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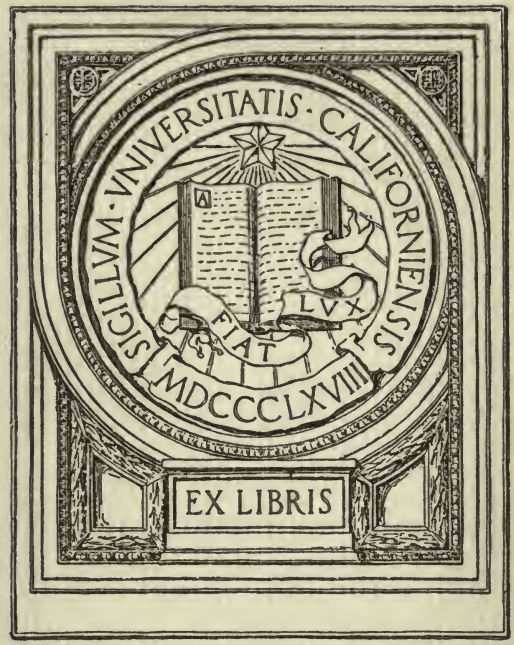
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WESTMINSTER ABBEY
THE LAST DAYS OF THE MONASTERY

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WESTMINSTER ABBEY

THE LAST DAYS OF THE MONASTERY

AS SHOWN BY THE LIFE AND TIMES OF

ABBOT JOHN ISLIP

1464-1532

BY

H. F. WESTLAKE, M.A., F.S.A.

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FOREWORD

The story of the last forty years of the monastery of Westminster centres round two persons. In the thirty-two years of John Islip's rule as Abbot he raised its glory to a height which it had never before attained. In the eight years that followed Abbot Boston reduced it to a level which made its dissolution easy. To plead that Boston was merely Cromwell's tool is to offer but little excuse, for it was a position Islip would have disdained to occupy. Had Islip lived to witness an end which perhaps was inevitable he might well have been involved in a tragedy such as that of Abbot Whiting of Glastonbury. As a man on the fringe of public life some accusation would not have been difficult to fabricate.

The history of these days therefore is best told in a biographical form, for Islip's activities and Boston's slack rule touched every department of monastic life. There are few subjects about which greater misconceptions still prevail than the dissolution of the monastic houses, and while this little book cannot hope to clear these away it may at least provide the true story of one such dissolution. The tale of the revival of the monastery under Feckenham in the reign of Queen Mary has not been told. It is a detached episode of very great interest but of very little importance save in one respect quite unconcerned with the after history of Westminster Abbey, namely that one of Feckenham's monks lived to pass on the lighted torch of the Benedictine succession.

H. F. WESTLAKE.

The Cloisters,
Westminster Abbey.

800851

CONTENTS

FOREWORD . . . . *Page* v.

CHAPTER I. The Management of the Monastery 1

,, II. Early Years of Brother John Islip 26

,, III. From 1492 to 1498 . . 37

,, IV. Islip as Prior . . . 53

,, V. Islip as Abbot . . . 67

,, VI. Islip in Public Life . . 84

,, VII. Islip as a Builder . . . 98

,, VIII. The Last Days of the Monastery . 112

CHAPTER I.

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE MONASTERY.

The Rule of St. Benedict, made about the year 540, contemplated only some four officials as in the main responsible for the management of the monastery. These were the Abbot, Prior, Cellarer and Porter. St. Benedict indeed makes mention of a class of officers called Deans, each of whom would be responsible for a group of ten monks engaged in the work of the field which formed an essential part of his scheme of life, but in actual practice no record exists, in England at least, of the subsequent existence of such officers. In the monastic government also some further distinction was made as between the few monks who were priests and the majority who in the earlier years of monastic history were commonly laymen.

By the time of Lanfranc, in the course of a quite natural development, additional officers had

come to be necessary, and besides those of the Rule there is mention in his *Constitutions* of the Cantor, Sacrist, Guestmaster, Almoner and Infirmarer. In the *Customary* of St. Peter's, Westminster, compiled by Abbot Ware about the year 1266, the number of Obedientiaries or principal officers had risen to at least fourteen, while to these must be added the many junior officers who worked directly under them either as deputies or assistants.

The gift or purchase of outlying estates and churches necessitated the appointment of officers to superintend their management and to be responsible for the due collection from them of rents and *pensions*. Moreover any particular extensions of the monastic buildings or church involved the appointment of a temporary *Warden of the New Work* to account for the necessary receipts and expenditure. It was customary to assign particular estates to the support of particular departments or else to arrange for the equitable division of profits among them all. Thus each official had definite sources of income for his office and definite objects upon which that income was to be expended. Year by year he was required to submit for audit a roll or balance-sheet accounting for the monies of his department, and to many of these rolls were attached bills or subsidiary rolls of which the chief roll might contain but a summary. It is from the

survival of such rolls that a knowledge of the internal economy of the monastery can be obtained, the duties of the various officials outlined, and the progress and cost of new buildings or repairs duly marked. At Westminster the number of such surviving rolls is over three thousand, and in addition there are many account-books exhibiting in the utmost detail the expenditure in certain of the departments.

Exceptions to the general scheme must, however, be noted. At Westminster the precentor's office had some small property in land attached to it and received some few pensions from churches, but the precentor himself kept no rolls, for his income and expenditure were small, and his duties were not such as to call for much outlay of money. The adult portion of his Secular Choir, the forerunners of the lay-vicars of the present day, were paid by contributions from the Sacrist and others, while the Subalmoner had the care of the Singing-children.

The archdeacon's duties were those of a legal rather than monastic character, and in consequence the history of his office is not to be found in monastic rolls. Similarly in the case of officers such as the prior and others, whose work was mainly that of supervision and discipline, little record survives, with the result that these are for the most part far more shadowy figures than the administrative officials. The latter seem oftentimes to live

again by the human touches which creep unawares into what at first glance might seem to be dull and stereotyped records of receipts and expenditure, and to leave small room for the record of personality. When we have read through some pages of Brother Thomas Browne's ill-written account-book, which in due course he must submit for the Abbot's inspection, how shall we translate the homely hexameter which quite suddenly appears: *Si mea pena valet, melior mea litera fiet*? Brother Thomas becomes no such remote figure after all!

St. Benedict had with keen foresight anticipated the possibility of a certain rivalry as between the Prior and Convent on the one side and the Abbot on the other, and he would seem to have regarded the prior's office as a necessary evil with which he would rather have dispensed. Could he have foreseen such a development as took place at Westminster it can hardly be doubted that he would have devised some special statutes to meet a situation which could never have been consistent with his ideals or with that half-departure from them which he may in his broad-mindedness have contemplated. For Westminster's Abbot was a feudal lord with the additional dignity of a mitre.

In that later history with which we are most concerned he dwelt apart from his flock. He was no longer the parent at the head of the table, with his children gathered round him at the common

meal. Affairs of state or of his own manorial business were among the lesser calls which might take him away from the family of which he was nominally the father.

The mere fact that he so dwelt apart was for more than two centuries a fruitful source of dissension. Two households had to be maintained from a common income: what was the proper division of it? New estates were bequeathed: what was their proper allocation? Anniversaries had to be performed: how should the proceeds be distributed? Innumerable and inevitable expenses had to be met: what share ought the Abbot to undertake?

Such were some of the questions which from time to time disturbed the peace of the family. Here and there a question could be solved by special legislation. It was easy when a vacancy occurred in the Abbacy for the Prior and Convent before they proceeded to election to lay down that the next Abbot should be solely responsible for the maintenance of the walls which protected their buildings from the periodical threat of inundation from the Thames. It was easy at such a time to adopt the general principle that of future bequests the Abbot should take four parts, the Prior two, and each professed member of the Convent one; but there came times when the ordinary provision for the Convent table was a matter of anxious

thought while the Abbot might seem to have no such cares. It is no wonder that, until some working arrangement was arrived at, each ensuing vacancy in the Abbacy should be the occasion for the formulation of conditions to which the new Abbot was bound to subscribe.

It is much to the spiritual credit of the Westminster community that in general such problems were met by the spontaneous generosity of the one side or the other. In all but one or two clearly defined cases it may be said that these problems ultimately made for goodwill rather than disruption, as giving occasion for the exercise of the primary virtue of the Christian life. They form indeed no part of the actual story, but some account of their nature is a necessary preliminary to an understanding of the economy of the monastery at any period of its history.

It is interesting to make a survey of the life and duties of the various conventual officials in these latter days.

In theory the Abbot still slept in the dormitory and a chamber was kept there for his use. In practice the only person who had access to it was the Receiver of his household, and Brother John Islip records that when he himself held that office he had two hundred pounds in money belonging to the Abbot which he kept in a chest in this chamber. In theory the Abbot dined in the refectory. In

practice this may have occasionally happened, but these occasions were evidently few. The ordinary arrangement was for a fixed allowance of bread, generally six convent loaves, to be sent to the Abbot when he was actually in residence at Cheyneygates —the house now occupied by the Dean—or at his Manor of Eye hard by. This allowance was not sent if he were absent at any other of his manors. Otherwise he was expected to maintain his household and entertain his private guests out of his official income. As it would not always be easy to distinguish between personal and official visitors it was provided that the Abbot might bring four guests to the refectory without charge, but should he bring more than this number he was to be responsible for the additional costs.

The Abbot's income was derived from a considerable number of sources, and in spite of the many existent documents which record them it is not easy to make any exact estimate of its total, but at the close of the fifteenth century it would seem to have amounted to not less than six hundred pounds a year, no mean sum when the relative value of money is considered. From this of course there were many necessary outgoings. Estates had to be kept up and wages paid to local bailiffs and workmen, and at the end of the financial year but a small balance remained to be carried forward—and this sometimes was on the wrong side of the account.

In one casually selected year the actual household expenses of the Abbot averaged more than forty pounds a month.

The income and expenditure of the Prior were of course on a more modest scale. Oysters, plaice, sturgeon, salmon, whelks—all these and many other articles of food appeared on his table as on the Abbot's, but his position did not require the same amount of entertaining of guests as fell to the latter. Moreover these were frequently of a lower degree in the social scale. For instance we note his breakfasts to the singing-men and dinners to those who had just made their profession in the monastery. Visits to his estate of Belsize formed his customary means of relaxation from the many cares of the monastery.

It may be well to say that neither in the case of Abbot or Prior does there appear to have been any ostentation in their manner of life or any extravagance in expenditure. Each played the part that the standard of the time expected of him. If the Abbot seems rather the feudal lord than the father of his flock at this period of monastic history, he was the victim of a development which he had done nothing to create and saw no adequate reason to alter. The Abbot of Westminster in the sixteenth century was no more deserving of censure for his mode of life than is a Dean of Westminster in the twentieth.

Of the administrative officials the Sacrist is in many ways the most interesting. He was responsible not only for the general survey of the fabric of the church and the necessary repairs thereto, but also for the provision of most of the accessories of worship. The main items of the income of his office were derived from properties within easy reach of the monastery, so that business was not apt to arise which would take him far afield from what must have been rather exacting duties. Taking a typical roll of the early sixteenth century, a long list of houses in the Sanctuary and King Street, Westminster, brought him rents amounting to about £137 out of a total income of just over £208. Some little property in London and elsewhere, with pensions from half a dozen churches such as Sawbridgeworth and Bloxham, the "farm" of St. Margaret's, Westminster, and the offerings in various of the Abbey chapels, accounted in the main for the balance. Among some curious items of receipt there is the yearly sum of thirty shillings and five pence paid to him by the Sheriffs of London for the maintenance of the lamp of Queen Matilda.

Apart from some few entries for the repair of houses his expenditure fell under four main heads. First, more than fifty-five pounds was spent under the title "purchase of stores." This included every kind of light, whether wax or oil, for both church

and monastery, incense, grease for the bells and charcoal for the sacristy.

The next heading is the familiar "church expenses." No less than twenty-four thousand breads were bought for the Celebrations. A long list includes the costs of the setting up of the great Paschal candle; repairs to vestments, thuribles, candlesticks, bells and other accessories; clearing away snow from the church roof and scattering the crows and pigeons that strove to nest there; mending the Abbot's pastoral staff and buying seven imitation pearls at two pence each to adorn his mitre. In similar lists in other of the Sacrist's rolls we find record of the periodical lending of copes for service in the King's palaces at Westminster and London, and in the year 1520 of the purchase of canvas and a chest in which to pack the copes for despatch across the sea, doubtless for Wolsey's use on the occasion of the historic meeting between Henry VIII. and Francis I. on the Field of Cloth of Gold where a chapel had been erected, "the last and most gorgeous display of the departing spirit of chivalry."

The two other main heads of expenses are repairs of the church and wages of the various workmen and servants, among whom are the clock-keeper, the rent-collector, the washerwoman and butler.

The few remaining rolls of the Subsacrist contain in detail matters which are only summarised in the

account of his superior. He was responsible for the distribution to the various chapels of their proper allotment of candles prior to the celebration of their special feasts. It is from him that we learn the dedications of forgotten altars, with here and there hints of old customs and lost usages.

Take for example the roll for the year ending at Michaelmas 1524. It is thirty-three feet in length and accounts in the utmost detail for the consumption of nearly five thousand pounds of wax, of which only some five hundred were for what may be called lighting purposes as distinct from "lights." From the notes which he supplies it is not hard to picture the refectory at Christmas time with the *corona* above St. Edward's statue ablaze with candles, the windows all lit up and the flaming torches that accompany the carrying-in of the boar's head. Or pass to the infirmary towards the end of that year where Brother Richard Charyng lay on his deathbed. He was thought to be dying on August 30th, but on September 3rd he was still alive. The Subsacrist knows it for he has had to supply pound tapers for his "Aneyleng." He reminds us that Abbots Berkyng, Bircheston, and Colchester were still remembered in the monastery though the first died as early as 1246, for he has supplied candles for the celebration of their "obits." When he writes of the "brassen chappell w^t^in the new chappell" we know what we had long suspected

—that there was an altar within the *grille* which surrounds the tomb of Henry VII. A few hints more and we could identify the dedications of the chapels in the apse of that King's building. When somewhere near St. George's day he issues a two-pound taper for the dragon, does he refer to some pageantry within the Abbey church or was it a gift to its appanage St. Margaret's, where we know a dragon to have been kept?

Perhaps the solution is to be found in a mandate addressed by Henry III. to Edward, son of Odo the goldsmith, requiring him to cause a dragon to be made in the fashion of a standard, of red silk sparkling all over with gold, the tongue of which should be made to resemble burning fire and appear to be continually moving, and the eyes of sapphires or other suitable stones. This standard was to be placed in the Church of St. Peter, Westminster.

The Chamberlain, like the Sacrist, derived most of his income from the rents of properties within easy reach. Bequests in the past had been specifically made for the provision of clothing for the monks, which was the Chamberlain's main duty. Nine London churches and two country ones, those of Ashwell and Uppingham, made contributions to an income of about ninety pounds a year. The Chamberlain was responsible neither for the clothing of the Abbot nor the outfit of the novices. The former was required to provide all things for

himself while the Treasurer paid for the somewhat elaborate list of articles required for the latter. Islip as Treasurer wrote down the full catalogue of these:—

In primis payede for ij peyre Straylys.
[Stragulæ = bed blankets]
Item pro uno materes cum j bolster.
Item for a payre Blankettis.
Item for ij Coverleddis.
Item for a pylow wt. ij pylowe Berys [cases].
Item for a Nyghte Cappe wt. ij kerchrys.
Item for a Coembe [? comb].
Item for a peyre Corkys.
Item for Cersey for ij peyre hoson wt. the makyng.
Item for the makyng of ij peyre Shockys.
Item for ij peyre Botis.
Item for ij ffemorallis [drawers] wt. the makyng.
Item for a Brygerdell.
Item for viij erdis of stamyn [linen] for ij stamyns [shirts] price the erde iiij d.
Item for a petycote.
Item for ij erdes and a quarter of Blake for on Cote price the erde ij s. viij d.
Item for ij erdis di of Blacke Cloth for an other Cote price the erde iij s.
Item for ij erdis and quarter of Blacke Coton for a Nygth Cote price the erde xij d.

Item for lynyng to the same iij Cotis to eche of them iiij erdis and a quarter price the erde Vd. ob. q^{a}.

Item for the makyng of ij hames Whodis.

Item for a pec. of Say to make ij Cowlys and a frocke.

Item for a Gerdell ij d. A purse viij d. A peyre of knyves viij d.

Item for viij lambes skynys for to ffur a hode and ij Cotis Slevys at the hande.

Item for ffurryng of the same.

The total for this bill came to £2 6s. 5d. exclusive of the first six items which have no charge entered and so were presumably drawn from stock.

The Chamberlain was accustomed to renew only some seven articles, those for actual day and night-wear. Directly responsible to him were the tailor, skinner and barber, the last of whom beside shaving the brethren had probably to bleed them periodically.

The Treasurer's income in the early sixteenth century was no less than three hundred and seventy-six pounds a year, of which two hundred and forty-one pounds were derived from twenty-four manors. Of these the Manor of Battersea was worth about sixty pounds. Hendon was even more profitable with eighty-eight, while Aldenham produced fifty-seven. It will be well, however, to

mention some of the items of his expenditure before noting the sources of the remainder of his income.

First in the demands on his purse was the purchase of grain. Four hundred quarters of wheat and a rather larger quantity of barley were bought for the Convent's consumption either in the form of bread or beer. Not all of this was purchased from outside. It will be obvious that since many of the offices were endowed with land each might have grain at its disposal, and it was clearly advantageous to have one's market so close at hand. Hence there arose a system of what may be termed inter-departmental dealing, the Treasurer purchasing the produce of other offices in wheat and at the same time perhaps selling his own surplus goods to others of his brother-officials.

The Treasurer's main purpose was the sustenance of the brethren. Accordingly in addition to his own purchases of food in the form of grain he made an allowance of ten shillings a day to the *Coquinarius*, whose office is not adequately described if his title be translated simply as "cook," while the ordinary rendering of "kitchener" entails the same objection. The *Coquinarius* would seem to have been a steward of the kitchen, combining the duties of an overseer and caterer. We shall take some further notice of him later.

Payments of the bailiffs of his manors, law expenses, and sundry items of no general interest

added to the Treasurer's expenditure; and at this period of history he found it, like his brethren in other monasteries, impossible to make both ends meet, and indeed his expenditure exceeded his assigned income by some hundreds of pounds.

That portion of his income, about one hundred and thirty pounds, of which no source has yet been indicated was drawn from the merging into the Treasurer's office of other offices which in former times had been held separately. The love for the Abbey felt by Queen Eleanor, wife of Edward I., had been marked by large monetary gifts during her lifetime. Her burial by the shrine of St. Edward prompted her husband to make proper provision for the maintenance of her anniversary, and five manors were almost immediately assigned to the monastery for that purpose, those of Birdbrook, Edenbridge, Westerham, Turweston and Knowle. Two other foundations of a similar character in connection with Richard II. and Henry V. succeeded in due course, and Wardens were appointed to administer the three.

By the time with which we are concerned these offices had been practically merged with the Treasurership. Consequently the Treasurer must account for the receipts and expenditure connected with them. The income therefrom swelled his total but gave him no surplus for his own purposes, since he must purchase the wax, pay for the masses said

and distribute what remained among the brethren in the usual proportion.

The office of Cellarer in the later history of the monastery of Westminster was one of dignity and importance, but its duties were probably of a considerably less exacting character than at the beginning. The tendency had been to divide the work formerly assigned and with the growth of buildings to create new offices, such as that of the Granator, rather than merely to provide assistants. Thus in the year ending Michaelmas 1527 the income of the office was only some eighty pounds a year, of which fourteen were spent in mending wagons, shoeing of horses, repairs of the water-mill and all the various expenses commonly associated with the life of the farmer.

The Cellarer had the oversight of the brewery, bakery and stables; paid the wages of the various labourers connected with them; bought shovels, coal-baskets and scoops; was responsible for repairs to the aqueduct which brought the Convent water —a frequent source of trouble,—and indeed performed a variety of small tasks the recital of which would only be tedious. In fact he was an altogether different person from what the popular imagination of to-day conceives him to have been.

The Granator's account was rendered yearly like that of other officers, but it was an account in kind and not in money. He dealt solely with wheat,

terms of these. So much had come from Wheathampstead; so much had he received at the hands of the Treasurer; so much had he delivered to the baker, and so on. His office demanded honesty on the part of its holder but made little demand on intelligence or business capacity.

The Almoner's rolls bring into view an entirely different aspect of monastic life. For any proper understanding of his office it is necessary to remember that the distribution of alms was an inevitable accompaniment of requiem masses. Did the Abbot or other benefactor of the monastery desire to be remembered in prayer after his death, then he not only bequeathed property to endow masses but assigned that portion of its yield which was to be distributed amongst the poor. Among the poor he would rightly reckon the brethren of his own monastery as well as those who came to its gates for alms. With some such endowments, though not with all, the Almoner was associated as administrator.

For example, on the anniversary of the death of Richard Berkyng, who had been Abbot from 1222 to 1246, we find the Almoner of the sixteenth century distributing twenty pence to each of the monks as well as paying one shilling to the celebrants of the mass which was still said weekly for the Abbot's soul.

Moreover the provision of some small amenities and comforts for the brethren was reasonably regarded as a legitimate charge upon the Almoner's resources. Thus he was accustomed to pay for mats for the cloister, dormitory and refectory. When the novice first arrived at the monastery it was the Almoner who saw that his *camera* or chamber in the dormitory was first properly cleansed, paid the penny for his tonsure and bought two pennyworth of straw with which to stuff his mattress. He made some public distribution of alms on rogation days to an amount varying from three to five pounds.

But the foregoing duties are incidental and the Almoner's first duty was to preside, with the Subalmoner's aid, over the almonry itself—which lay to the south of Tothill Street outside the ancient boundary-wall of the precinct. Here was an almshouse and its chapel of St. Anne, but little can be discovered as to either. Prior to the foundation of the time of Henry VII., of which something will be said later, we read of payments to the "six poor men of St. Edward" who in the year 1492 begin to be called the "six soldiers of St. Edward." Then there are the lay-brothers of the almonry, also six in number, who received one mark a year for their clothing and for whom sixteen pence a week was paid for food. These latter come first into view in the rolls about the year 1390, when each was

receiving a loaf daily from the Cellarer. Provision was made for them to attend a weekly mass on Saturdays, but their other duties and manner of life generally in later days do not seem to be anywhere defined.

The Almoner's income was not large, amounting in an average year to about seventy pounds. Some further account of his cares will appear in the narrative of Abbot Islip's earlier years.

Just as the Almonry had its chapel of St. Anne so the Infirmary placed itself under the protection of St. Katharine, but while the Almonry has long disappeared the ruins still remain to hint the beauties of the Infirmary chapel, and the Infirmarer's own refectory is still intact.

About thirty-three pounds represents the average income attached to the office. The two rectories of Wandsworth and Battersea provided more than a third of this, and the Church of St. Andrew at Pershore a little over eight pounds. A few rents of houses and a portion of the Manor of Parham in Sussex made up the remainder.

The Infirmarer kept a careful record of the names of his patients and the number of days which each spent under his charge. This was necessary in order that he might render a faithful account of his stewardship, for it was considered that the cost of a sick monk was three pence on a meat day and

two pence on a fish day. The allowance for his own expenses was reckoned at twenty-three pence a week. On St. Katharine's day he was accustomed to send twenty shillings for the entertainment of the Abbot and Convent, and the balance of his income might be charged with necessary repairs either to the Infirmary buildings or to the houses of which the Infirmarer was the landlord.

In addition to the Treasurer of whom some account has been given there was an official known as the Domestic or Inner Treasurer, whose rolls are of interest as shewing in part the manner by which the monks obtained their slender individual incomes.

So far as this department was concerned these arose from the endowments of various chantries within the church. In some cases only the celebrants of the masses received any payment, but in others all the brethren participated. In the case of the anniversary of Abbot Kyrton the Prior received two shillings and each brother one, while the reigning Abbot did not benefit. In that of one John Blokley the Abbot took eight pence, the Prior, the President of the Refectory, and the Refectorer four pence each, and the brethren two pence each.

The Domestic Treasurer dealt also with the receipts from properties which belonged in common to the Prior and Convent as distinct from the

Abbatial lands and manors. Each officer taxed his own income at the rate of one penny in the mark towards the general fund, but it does not appear that the Domestic Treasurer administered the proceeds.

The Refectorer's office was not one of great importance. It might be supposed that he was concerned with the provision of meals for the brethren, but the only article of food which it was his duty to provide was cheese, which cost between three and four pounds a year out of an income of little more than ten. He was responsible for the general upkeep of the refectory, whether for the repair of its walls and windows or the renewal when necessary of the cloths and other appurtenances of the table. He provided the wax for such candles as the Subsacrist was not required to supply, and cushions for the seats of the President and seniors.

Some slight information can be gleaned from his rolls as to the general arrangements of the refectory. There was the table of the President with the *skilla* or bell beside it, the sounding of which marked the various incidents of the meal; the two tables of the senior monks, the two tables appropriated to the undistinguished among the brethren, the table of the novices, and finally that set for the poor—the *mensa pauperum*. Somewhere in the refectory stood a statue of St. Edward with a crown of lights above him, which must be in order for the Feasts of the

Translation and Deposition of the Convent's tutelary saint. We note the homely designation of the larger cups as the *Long Robin* and the *Charity Bowl*.

The Monk Bailiff is perhaps the most perplexing of any of the monastic officers. It is not possible as in the case of others to obtain any adequate conception of his duties from the rolls which he kept, for he records merely the payment of fees without specifying the various services rendered. It must be supposed that he was responsible for general matters of law in which the monastery might be involved, for he notes year by year a payment of twenty shillings to the monastery's attorney in the royal exchequer, of another twenty shillings to an attorney in the King's Bench and of double that sum to an attorney in the Common Bench, with other smaller payments to legal officials. Fees to the bailiffs of the liberties in various counties also occur with regularity. He had his own apartments and staff of servants, his own stables, grooms and horses.

Some few of the Kitchener's notebooks have survived, shewing in the utmost detail all the items of his expenditure on the food of the brethren. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday were ordinarily kept as days of abstinence from meat. It seems probable from the form of certain entries that meat was served in the Refectory only on Sundays. In the Misericorde where the brethren who had been

bled took their meals, as well as those monks who for any reason had been ordered a more generous diet, meat was served on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, both at dinner and supper—unless of course some fast-day fell on one of these, while eggs might be served for supper there on Wednesdays.

The ordinary dinner in the Refectory consisted of two fish courses with the Convent loaf in addition. On Sundays it was not uncommon to provide nine pieces of beef, two sheep and two fat pigs, with "smalle poddynges." Forgotten terms are recalled in *scroffe* or Shrove Sunday and Shrove Monday as well as Shrove Tuesday. On the two latter days a breakfast was provided, in addition to the ordinary fare, of red herrings and red sprats. Throughout Lent neither meat nor eggs was provided either in the Refectory or Misericorde, but leeks, onions, and peas for pottage occur frequently, with now and then a pittance of salt eels. The Sunday dinner was varied by the provision of figs and almonds. One red herring each was served on Good Friday with some almonds and rice, but white herrings were bought for guests. On *Schere* or Maundy Thursday it was the custom for the Abbot to supplement the Convent meal. Easter Day of course saw a considerable relaxation. Eggs for breakfast and supper, veal and beef at dinner with currant puddings to follow, not to mention two

gallons of wine, marked the joyous character of the festival. The Kitchener's expenses varied between three and six pounds a week.

One other important officer remains to be noted, the Warden of the Lady Chapel. He had his own property and consequently was obliged to submit his accounts for yearly audit, but it is sufficient to say of him that he did for the Lady Chapel in all respects what the Sacrist did for the rest of the church.

A number of minor officials receive occasional mention. We read of the Wardens of other Chapels in the monastery, of the Keeper of St. Edward's Shrine, the Keeper of the relics and so on, but curiously enough only here and there is there any actual record of a Guestmaster and that only in the reign of Henry III. It seems probable that every professed monk in the monastery was provided with some specific task or charge.

It would be easier to write a volume than a single chapter on monastic life at Westminster. What has been here set down is no more than what the surviving rolls and documents of the later times actually tell as to the surroundings and life of the last sixty years of the monastery's history.

CHAPTER II.

THE EARLY YEARS OF BROTHER JOHN ISLIP.

In the closing years of the fifteenth century, almost certainly in the year 1492, John Islip began to keep a diary. Like many another such volume it is remarkable for the prolixity of its earlier pages, the scantier entries which succeed them, and the final omission of all but necessary business notes which had to be recorded somewhere. It is from this diary that the facts of his first years are derived. He was twenty-eight years old and it seemed a fitting occasion to put down something of the story of his life, for already he had become of some importance in the monastery by his appointment to offices of considerable responsibility and trust. So he records what seemed to him the leading events of his earlier days and some few happenings in the life of the outside world that had struck him as of interest or importance.

He was born at Islip in Oxfordshire on June 10th in the year 1464. Islip itself had been the birthplace of Edward the Confessor whose father is said to have built a palace there. Its manor was an early endowment given by Edward to his newly-founded monastery of Westminster and, if old Thomas Hearne is to be believed, "the said mannour was formerly the best wooded of any mannour that belonged to Westminster."

As far back as the reign of Henry III. (1216-1272) there had been at Islip a small chantry chapel in memory of the Confessor which the same writer tells us stood "a little way Northward from the church but fifteen yards in length and a little above seven in breadth." It may be assumed that its character changed with the dissolution of the chantries in 1547, for it was afterwards turned into a barn and is shewn as such in an engraving in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December, 1788, but is recorded there as having disappeared at least twenty years before.

From the time of its first building the Abbot and Convent of Westminster had appointed the chantry priest who ministered at its altar. The little town had already been the birthplace of at least one great churchman in the person of Simon, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1349, and had given one monk to Westminster in the same century. The more conscientious of the chantry priests were wont

to spend in the education of children the considerable leisure that their duties allowed them, and it is no great flight of fancy which imagines the first training of and the awakening of the first sense of vocation in John Islip as due to the teaching of such an one.

Of his parents nothing is known, but from the fact that in 1496 he was himself paying thirteen shillings and four pence quarterly from his small allowances for the board and education of his sister Agnes, with an additional shilling for her shoes and gaiters, it may be supposed that they were by then no longer living. It was customary on entering the monastery for the family name to be discarded and the place name used instead, so we know him only as "John Islip."

The search for his patronymic yields nothing of certainty. For a moment it seems successful when in a document of the year 1506 we read the words *Johannes de Pacientia Abbas*, but the hope is ludicrously dispelled when we find that but for scribal carelessness they would have read *Johannes Dei pacientia Abbas*. One possible clue may be given for what it is worth. In the second picture of the beautiful mortuary roll which was begun in Islip's honour but which was destined never to be completed, St. Giles is depicted as standing alone on the right-hand side of the Abbot as he lay on his deathbed, while in the dexter corner of the base

of the penwork which frames the Abbot's portrait in the first picture are shewn the arms of the family of Giles, the sinister corner being filled with the arms of the monastery. The significance of the relative position of these two shields will be appreciated by the student of heraldry. It may be noted also that in the time of Islip's rule as Abbot mention is found of a chapel of St. Giles* which seems to appear then for the first time and may well have been one of the radiating chapels of the apse of the new Lady Chapel built by Henry VII.

The connection between the monastery at Westminster and the town of Islip must have been kept alive not only by the chantry chapel and the sentiment that must needs have linked the places of the Confessor's birth and burial, but also by the visits which from time to time were paid to his manor by the Abbot or one of his officials. Doubtless many a recruit was thus brought to the Abbey from one or other of its outlying estates. So it came to pass that John Islip entered the monastery on March 21st, the Feast of St. Benedict, 1480, and for six years—he records it himself as seven—lived the common life of the novice.

He was not yet sixteen years old and it may be supposed that the somewhat confined character of the life of the cloister told for a time on the health

* See also page 108.

of the country-bred lad, for in the first three or four years at Westminster he spent three considerable periods in the infirmary, his first and most severe illness lasting more than two months.

The monastery at the time of his entrance was somewhat depleted in numbers doubtless owing to the troublous years through which England had been passing. In the preceding decade only some ten novices had sought entrance and at the beginning of the year 1480 there were less than forty monks. In this year, however, there were eight admissions, and the number was never again to fall so low in Islip's lifetime.

The Abbot was John Estney, a man of about sixty years of age who had ruled the monastery already for six years and was to rule it for eighteen more. To him in all probability more than to any other were due the influences which were to shape Islip's life, and indeed it may well have been he who brought the boy to the monastery in the first place. He had been a priest for thirty-eight years and had held most of the offices of importance in the community.

For a time the ways of Abbot and novice lay widely separated, but the interest of the one and the ability of the other were destined within a few years to bring them together in the closest contact. Estney was by no means the oldest of the monks either in years or seniority. Pride of place in both

respects was shared between three others. John Amondesham, priest and scholar, was now seventy-two years old at least. He had been sent to the University of Oxford as a selected student as long ago as the year 1432 and was reputed sufficiently learned to have been brought from there on two occasions to preach the Good Friday sermon before the monastery. He had never risen higher than the position of Sacrist, and that post he had long relinquished to spend his days quietly in one of the *cameræ* of the Infirmary. When John Islip first saw him he had but a year more of life left to him.

Contemporary with Amondesham were Richard Sporley and Richard Tedyngton, men presumably of no more than mediocre ability though the former perhaps would have laid claim to some literary skill in the compilation of a history of the Abbey, derived mainly from the work of one who had been his fellow-monk, John Flete. It is a claim which the verdict of to-day will not allow. Old men were Brothers Sporley and Tedyngton but still with some years of life before them.

Of those who entered at about the same time as Islip three shewed promise enough to be sent to the University, but no one of them left any obvious mark afterwards upon the community at Westminster.

The life as a novice was one of strict discipline and considerable toil. Until the rules of the new

life were learnt in practice as well as theory it may well have been irksome, as indeed all strict discipline must be until it is seen as a means and not an end, as the necessary grammar before the new language can unfold its beauties.

The customary period of the novitiate was seven years. During this time the novice was under the sole care of the novice-master, through whose hands he received all his necessary clothing and bedding, supplied ultimately by the Chamberlain. He received none of the monetary allowances made to professed monks, nor indeed was he allowed to handle money at all. His instruction came from the novice-master, who was to report the matter if he shewed signs of special ability in order that his claims to a university career might be considered, in accordance with the Benedictine custom of sending to Oxford one in twenty of the community.

The main subject in the educational system was of course the Latin tongue in order that a proper understanding might be acquired both of the Scriptures and of the various orders of service. The latter indeed had to be learnt by heart and the novice-master would hear the repetition.

John Islip would seem not to have shewn any great ability as a scholar, at least in Latin, for he was not one of those selected to proceed to the university. He was sufficiently advanced, however, to be professed and ordained priest in his twenty-

second year in accordance with a special privilege of the Westminster community. Scarcely had he said his first mass when he was appointed domestic chaplain to the Abbot and probably at the same time to the office of Sub-almoner. The former appointment would bring him into intimate contact with a wider life than he had hitherto known, while the latter would provide the first test of those administrative abilities which might mark him in due course for promotion to higher offices.

The duties of the Abbot's chaplain in these later years of the monastery of Westminster are nowhere defined. In the fourteenth-century Customary of Canterbury it is written that such chaplains should be polite, discreet and pleasant, especially to all strangers. They form as it were a link between the Abbot and his Convent and are bidden to foster the love of the Abbot to the Convent and that of the Convent to the Abbot. Their other duties relate mainly to the due performance of masses in the private chapel and the general regulation of the Abbot's household. At Durham it was the custom for the chaplain to be summoned to the bedside of a dying monk "who staied wth him till he yealded y^{e} ghoste," but no such duty seems to have been required at Westminster, the Prior being deemed responsible for the last offices. It can, however, hardly be wrong to assume that the position was one of tact and confidence as well as of invaluable

experience to a man who within a comparatively few years was himself to occupy the Abbot's place.

As Sub-almoner Islip's duties were of a very practical character. His primary responsibility was for the children of the almonry and of the song school. These had their meals in common and were clothed and educated at the expense of the monastery. In due course the Sub-almoner took them to London to be apprenticed to masters of different trades, and would use the opportunity to purchase russet-coloured fustian for the coats of the "syngyng children," with white cotton to line them, black velvet to bind them, and "sylkyn poyntts" for further decoration. His interest in the children did not end with their passing from his immediate control, for visits were paid from time to time to their masters and presents made in time of sickness.

Apparently the purchase of music books came into his department—if we may judge from a payment of five shillings made on one occasion for a "pryksong booke of masses, antems and other songis." Year by year on St. Nicholas' Eve and Day the festival of the Boy-Bishop was kept by the singing children, and it was the Sub-almoner's duty to provide the necessary costumes as well as provisions for the festivity, such as milk-bread, "cowmfetts," and the like. New shoes and hosen were bought as well as gloves, and eight pence

had to be provided for the Boy-Bishop's offering at the shrine of St. Edward and the altar of Our Lady of the Pew.

The singing children assisted at the high mass and evensong on all the principal feasts, and doubtless some of them developed a vocation for the monastic life.

Besides the charitable care exercised by the Sub-almoner over the children of the almonry and song school, he was in part also responsible for the children of the Grammar School whose parents were not in need of charity. The latter had a master of their own who was paid three shillings and four pence a quarter in money for his trouble, but probably received his board and lodging in addition. The grammar children, as they are called uniformly both in monastic times and throughout the years immediately succeeding the dissolution, find a complete continuity with the Westminster School of to-day, and it is in consequence with no surprise that we read in a Sub-almoner's notebook about the year 1526 of the payment of sixteen pence for "wryttyng of a play for the children."

Among the officials responsible to the Sub-almoner were the butler and keeper of the "Corde Hall" or *Corde* as the monastic *Misericorde* was commonly called, and here it would seem the grammar children took their meals.

With such cares as these Islip's life can have been no idle one, though he did not think it worth while to record in his diary anything of such commonplace tasks. These were duties within the cloister so to speak, and he began his diary on his appointment to offices which would take him farther afield and provide him with responsibilities to which his earlier duties might seem trivial.

CHAPTER III.

FROM 1492 TO 1498.

Next in chronological sequence to the references in his diary to Islip's earlier years is the brief entry that "on October 2, 1492 the King crossed the sea and came to the town called *Le Slewse* and afterwards went as far as *Bulleyn*, and there was killed Lord John Savage, Knight, by the French, and various others, and in the month of December the King returned."

We may note first of all a point of some small historical interest. The date of the King's return to England is given as December 17th by Hall, Stow, and other chroniclers, but the *Chronicle of Calais* gives November 17th, a date with which Professor Pollard seems to concur, for he says that there is nothing to account for Henry's delay at Calais for a whole month.* Islip of course does not account for it, but he must be allowed to settle the month, for he had particular reason to remember

it, apart from the fact that he was a diarist contemporary with the event he was recording. Henry's expedition was important enough in itself to call for chronicle, for it resulted in the long-delayed peace with France; but Islip recorded nothing that did not touch the monastery directly or indirectly, and this was a matter of direct importance to it as will presently appear.

In 1487 Henry VII. in a letter to the Pope related how a rumour of his defeat and the dispersal of his army had been circulated in London and Westminster. "When this was heard by some of those who by reason of their crimes enjoy the privileges and immunities of Westminster, being of opinion that after the commission of any nefarious crime soever they could have the free privilege of returning to that sanctuary . . . . took up arms for the purpose of plundering the houses of those whom they knew to be in the field with us and mustered in a body for the commission of crime. Amongst their number was one John Swit who said: 'And what matter the censures of Church or Pontiff? Do you not perceive that interdicts of this sort are of no weight whatever, since you see with your own eyes that those very men who obtained such in their own favour are routed and that the whole anathema has recoiled upon their own heads?' On pronouncing these words he

* Pollard: Henry VII., Vol. I. page 93 and note.

instantly fell dead upon the ground and his face and body immediately became blacker than soot itself. . . . Verily we give thanks to Almighty God Who of His ineffable mercy has exhibited in our Kingdom so great a miracle concerning the Xtian faith."

Miracle or not—and some of its more repulsive details have been omitted—it will be seen that Henry had no love for the sanctuary men who typified the very reverse of that law and order which he was endeavouring to establish. The Abbot was ultimately responsible for the safe keeping of the sanctuary men, as well as for the convicts committed to his prison, and was doubtless duly censured by the King. Indeed he would have had to obtain a royal pardon. Unfortunately at the end of September, just as Henry was starting on his expedition, twelve convicts escaped from the Abbot's prison.

Henry was actually on the road but Prior Essex and others set out in hot haste to catch him. They came up with him at Canterbury and asked for his pardon. Henry, however, would not grant it, and told them he should defer the matter until he returned from France and came to Westminster.

It can easily be imagined with what trepidation the Convent awaited the King's return, for they had reason to expect the severest penalties. Their fears were not unjustified, for on February 9th,

1493, the matter came before the King's Bench and the Abbot was adjudged to pay the King no less than twelve hundred pounds. Such a sum could not immediately be forthcoming, and the Abbot accordingly entered into a bond for the payment.

Eventually, however, by the intervention of Sir Reginald Bray the King reduced the penalty to a thousand marks, the last instalments of which, amounting in all to £166 13s. 4d., were paid off by Islip as Abbot's Receiver in the year 1497. That Islip was correct in his note of the month of the King's return may therefore well be credited.

Islip goes on to record that in this same year, 1492, there died at Bermondsey the lady Elizabeth, sometime queen and wife of Edward IV. Again the matter is not one solely of external interest. On two occasions Elizabeth had sought sanctuary at Westminster. The first was in 1470 when with her daughters and Lady Scrope she had fled to the precinct on the reverse of Edward IV. in that year. Here her son, Edward V., was born. Her food was sent from Abbot Milling's household and the Abbot himself was godfather to the ill-fated child at his baptism by the Sub-prior. When Edward returned in triumph to London she left to join him, only to return some twelve years later with the young Duke of York.

On this second occasion she received the personal hospitality of Abbot Estney. Islip was but a novice

at the time but he could not have helped knowing of the important events which were happening within the monastery itself. Moreover Elizabeth's name was already honoured in the community as the donor of the new chapel of St. Erasmus erected in 1478, probably at the west door of the old Lady Chapel.

When in 1486 she was restored to her full rights as queen-dowager she could think of no more pleasant place to live than in the monastery which had formerly sheltered her, and the Abbot's house called Cheyneygates (the present Deanery) was leased to her for forty years. She lived there, however, but a few months, for in 1487 her lands were again forfeited and she retired to end her days in the abbey of Bermondsey.

In the summer of the year 1491, probably in the month of June, Prior Robert Essex died, and in July the Westminster students were summoned from Oxford to assist in the election of his successor. Among them was Roger Blake, and upon him fell the choice of the Convent. He survived his appointment, however, only a few weeks, and by Michaelmas George Fascet was appointed in his place.

Blake as a student at Oxford had of course held no appointment within the community, so that his election as Prior made no change in the roll of its officers. Fascet on the other hand held the two

important positions of Treasurer and Monk-Bailiff as well as being Warden of the Manors. These offices thus became vacant and in addition other changes were taking place. William Mane who had held office along with Fascet both as Treasurer and Warden of the Manors had been appointed Almoner. For a short time he carried on the duties of Monk-Bailiff in place of Fascet, but the total burden must have proved too heavy to bear, and accordingly on October 12th, 1492, John Islip was chosen to hold with him the joint office of Warden of the Manors and along with Richard Newbery to succeed him and Fascet as Treasurers. At the same time Islip took Mane's place as Monk-Bailiff and Warden of the Churches.

Islip was only twenty-eight years of age and there were twenty-three monks senior to him in a community that numbered about fifty. It argues well alike for his personal popularity and for the esteem in which his administrative abilities must have been held by both Abbot and Convent that the choice for such high offices should have fallen upon him.

Two attractive prospects were opened to him on his accession. As Monk-Bailiff he had separate apartments where his business could be transacted and where on occasion he could entertain friends. Accordingly we find in his diary for Sunday, February 10th, 1493, an entry which may be translated: *I was at the High Mass but I did not*

sit in the Refectory because John Butler of Warwickshire and Thomas Candysse dined with me in the Bailiff's guest-room.

Still more alluring perhaps to one in whom the life of the cloister can never have stamped out the love of the open country was the necessary duty from time to time as Treasurer of making a tour of the various properties of the monastery. It is not surprising that this should have been found necessary in his first year of office. Acquaintance with these properties was certainly to be desired and there can have been no conflict between the call of duty which would take him again into the ways of men and the cloistered conscience which would shut him from them.

St. Benedict himself indeed sanctioned occasional absence from the cloister so long as the Abbot's leave was first obtained. The novice vowed faithfulness to the monastery of his profession but not complete or permanent seclusion within its walls, and if it be urged that such protracted absence as this of the new Treasurer would never have been contemplated by St. Benedict it might with equal truth be argued that St. Benedict could hardly be expected to foresee the acquirement of the scattered properties which made such absence necessary. In any case the Benedictine ideal of the monastery was the ideal of the self-contained family and would not be infringed in spirit at least by the

necessary absence on family business of one member of it.

Accordingly after dinner on Sunday, June 30th, 1493, Islip set out on a tour which was to last nearly a month. On the first day he rode as far as Aldenham and held a court there on the Monday morning. Rising betimes on Tuesday he rode as far as Berkhampstead to mass, dined with Master John Shorne and went on to Langton for the night, where he held a court the next day. Thursday was a day of relaxation and he records that the whole of it was spent in the forest hunting in company with Master Lanxston and Master Gifford. Langton to Turweston and Banbury, Banbury to Warwick and Knowle, Coventry, Leicester, Oakham, Oundle, Huntingdon, so does he proceed, rising early and covering many miles before hearing his daily mass and breaking his fast. Offord, Langford, Ashwell, Malden, Feering, Kelvedon, Benfleet, Romford, such are some further stages of his journey. Only once did he spend more than one night in the same place, so that the tour if pleasant was by no means dilatory. He reached home again on July 24th.

He does not record what servants attended him, but the whole cost of his journey was two hundred and fifty-one marks, an average of ten marks a day, so that it is probable that such retinue accompanied him as befitted the dignity of his office and the safety of his person. That some such protection

was necessary in those unsettled times will presently appear.

For the most part his tour was devoid of trouble incidental to the business aspect of it. Only at South Benfleet had he reason to suspect that anything was wrong. His suspicions were evidently corroborated after his return to Westminster, for on August 11th he returned to South Benfleet and seized the goods of William Gose who was his "farmer" or agent for the manor and parsonage there. A careful inventory and valuation was made of them, and they were reckoned to be worth just over forty-two pounds. Gose was evidently dismissed from office, for a little later Islip records the handing over of the stores of the manor to Thomas Petigrewe.

The dangers of the road have just been hinted at and he was a wise man who kept to the King's highway. That Islip had them in mind may be assumed from a long entry in his diary somewhat previous to his tour. It was a story which he had heard at the Abbot's table one Sunday from Richard Dolonde the Abbot's guest. A certain priest with three servants had wandered from the high road and come to Egerston at about eight o'clock in the evening. When the priest's groom went into the stable of the inn to fetch straw for his horses he found beneath the straw two men lying dead. He came and told his master what he had

found, and the latter called the hostess and told her that he could not stay there that night. She asked him the cause and said "The supper is prepared, the meat killed and all things are ready, and now you will not wait, I marvel strongly." Then the priest pretended different reasons for his going and at last told her the true one, saying "I do not dare to stay the night here for that two men lie dead in your stable." She answered "This is the truth, don't doubt it. It so happened yesterday towards nightfall two knights were here and their servants fought among themselves so that these two men were killed, then the others in fear asked my husband and me to hide their bodies and bury them this night. This we intend to do, so don't fear." The priest believed indeed that what the woman said was true and so stayed. But about nine o'clock the priest was lying on his bed, being unwilling to get into it because of his fear, when the landlord came and knocked at the chamber door and said "Sir, I have brought you apples and pears and a draught of good wine." Then the priest replied "I am in bed, I do not wish to drink to-night." But the other said "Open the door that I may speak with you." Then the priest said "No." The other replied "Then I will break it." So he broke the door and came to the priest with eleven other men well-armed and said "Seek pardon of your Creator for you shall die and all your

servants," who when he heard this asked that he might hear the confessions of his servants. So he heard them and when confession was done the priest came with his servants and but one dagger and rushed on the men and killed nine of them. The other three were taken and hanged, and the wife was burned and so the priest escaped with his servants, "thanking God to Whom was the honour and the glory, Amen."

It may be with such dangers in mind that Islip spent three pence on arrows for his servant, Robert Seston. The latter received five shillings a quarter for his wages but was provided with clothing, shoes, and doubtless food also, at his master's expense. In addition he might look forward to a tip of twenty pence on Christmas day as well as on the anniversaries of Queen Eleanor and King Richard II. As Monk-Bailiff Islip had his own cook and outfit of kitchen utensils, while two grooms were in his permanent employment to look after the needs of the seven or eight horses living in his stables.

It might well be thought that the offices to which Islip had been appointed in the year 1492 would have provided him with but little leisure from their exercise to assume new duties. In the year 1496, however, William Brewode retired from the onerous position of Cellarer and Islip was elected in his place. The reason for this retirement does not appear. Brewode was only fifty years of age and

there was no suggestion that he was unfit any longer to hold an office which he had honourably filled for twelve years and which four years later he was to fill again for a brief space before becoming Warden of the Lady Chapel. It may be that Islip was already so clearly marked out for promotion to the highest places of all that it was thought well for him to have experience of the widest possible character. This, however, is the merest speculation, and the reason for the change must be left in obscurity. In the same year Islip appears in the *rôle* of Abbot's Receiver, a position he may have occupied for the four previous years though no record of it has survived.

In the two years that followed no incident seems to have occurred of sufficient importance to call for special mention either in his own life or that of the monastery until the beginning of the year 1498, when a few entries recall a story of some historical interest in which Islip was directly involved.

As far back as the year 1415 Henry V. had directed in his Will that his body was to be buried in the Abbey Church of St. Peter, Westminster, among the sepulchres of the Kings on the spot where the relics of the saints were commonly kept. The beautiful chantry chapel which was afterwards built in his honour attests the care with which his direction was carried out.

About the middle of the fifteenth century, before

the chapel was entirely completed, Henry VI. paid many visits to the Abbey church to see his father's tomb and select the site for his own, moved thereto by the same love for St. Edward that had fixed his father's choice. Many spots were suggested. Here he could lie, in the grave where Queen Eleanor's bones had so long rested. It would be no trouble to move her tomb. Or there in the Lady Chapel was a suitable place. True the tomb of his mother Katharine must be moved further westwards, but then the opportunity could be used to see that it was more "honourably apparelled." Or why not move Henry V. a little to one side and so make room for the son by the father? "Nay, let hym alone, he lieth lyke a nobyll prince, I wolle not troble hym." In the same spirit did he reject one suggestion after another, finally choosing a site on the north side of the Confessor's Shrine, and John of Thirsk the Abbey mason was called upon to mark out the place with his pick.

When, however, some twenty years later Henry died in the Tower his body was taken first to the Abbey of Chertsey. In consequence of the story of miracles wrought at his tomb Richard III. caused the coffin to be removed to Windsor. In the ordinary course of events the story should end there. But a second chapter begins with the devotion to Henry's memory which began to spring up in the country, more especially in the east and

north, within less than ten years from his death. Images of him were set up in churches and lights burnt before them. New gilds were founded in his honour and old gilds in one or two instances added his name to their dedications. He had already been canonised in the popular imagination before Henry VII. determined to secure that canonisation by authority and build a shrine-chapel at Windsor where his body already rested.

The claims of Windsor were immediately contested by the Abbeys of Chertsey and Westminster. On February 20th, 1498, the Abbot and Convent of Westminster petitioned the King *pro corpore beati viri Henrici Sexti*. The matter was referred to the Lord Chancellor and the Privy Council, sitting in the Star Chamber and at Greenwich.

Proceedings began on February 26th and the Abbot of Chertsey was heard first. He advanced the subtle plea that the royal corpse had been forcibly exhumed and taken away without the consent of his convent by Richard who was King in fact but not in right, leaving it to be inferred that such removal was therefore unlawful. The Dean and Chapter of Windsor followed. They had been wise enough to take advantage of the traditional enmity between the Abbey of Westminster and the College of St. Stephen in the royal palace. They found ready councillors in the Dean

and Canons of the latter foundation and learned probably from them the form of the plea which it was intended to put forward on behalf of the Abbey. They first of all contended that so far from the removal being against the will of the Chertsey monks the Abbot himself had actually assisted at the exhumation with his own hands. Moreover the King had chosen his own place of sepulture at Windsor. They added that if no choice at all could be proved then possession ought to decide the matter.

The Abbot of Westminster was represented by the Prior, George Fascet, and Islip as Monk-Bailiff. Islip was no stranger to the law, for in 1492 his name appears on the admission register of Gray's Inn and in 1512 he was regarded as among its most distinguished members.

The Westminster plea was first of all Henry's own choice. A mass of testimony was offered from the sworn statements of twelve different witnesses who had been present at one or other of Henry's visits to the Abbey church. This was a strong case in itself as it does not appear that Windsor had any such evidence to offer. Secondly it was pleaded that Westminster had for a long time been and still was the burial-place of Kings, and thirdly that since the Palace of Westminster was bound by both practical and sentimental ties to the Abbey Henry was to be considered a parishioner.

The case was adjourned till March 2nd and Islip records the many incidental expenses to which he had been put for counsel's opinion, travelling costs and the like.

Judgment was given on March 5th in favour of Westminster, on the ground of Henry's own choice and because it was the burial-place of kings. Needless to say the fact that the Yorkist Kings Edward IV. and Richard III. were interred elsewhere was ignored.

It is from this judgment that we must date the first conception of the new Lady Chapel, commonly known as the Chapel of Henry VII. Its foundation-stone was not to be laid for four and a half years and in the meanwhile its primary purpose was to disappear. In the meanwhile also fresh changes came into the life of the monastery, and the rest of the story may well take its place in connection with them.

CHAPTER IV.

ISLIP AS PRIOR.

On May 24th, 1498, Abbot John Estney died. He had ruled the monastery for twenty-four years and was nearly eighty years of age. There are indications that he had been for some time failing in health, and the fact that he had played no part in the action before the Privy Council in the matter of the burial of Henry VI. suggests that most of his powers had been by this time delegated to others. He had deserved well of the community and his loss must have been felt keenly by his sometime Chaplain, John Islip.

The choice of the Convent fell upon Prior Fascet as Estney's successor. He was only about forty-two years old, but it must have been fairly clear from the first that the choice was made rather in view of his past services than for any future benefit

he could confer upon the community. The plea of unfitness for the task that he made when the election was first announced to him was more than merely formal. But a year later and he was to forsake the independence of the abbatial manors and occupy the chamber in the monastic infirmary specially set apart for those for whom there seemed some hope of restoration to health. For him, however, such restoration was not to be, and in the late summer of the year 1500 he died. This is, however, to anticipate, and we must go back to his appointment to the Abbacy two years earlier.

He chose Islip as his successor in the office of Prior. It is at this point in Islip's career that one of the small difficulties in the reconstruction of mediæval monastic life presents itself. There were two occasions in a monk's career at Westminster which were deemed worthy of especial congratulation. The one was the celebration of his first mass after ordination to the priesthood, following on the conclusion of his noviciate, and the other when for the first time he sat *ad skillam*—"by the bell." The *skilla* was the bell which was sounded by the Prior, or in his absence by the President, in the Refectory for grace to be said, for the lection to begin or end, or for some other usual signal of the mealtime. To sit by the bell, therefore, primarily meant to preside at the monastic meal.

The phrase, however, seems to have been used

more loosely of those who occupied seats at the President's table and thus to become capable of a certain ambiguity. It was customary at Westminster for the heads of the various departments to make a present in money or in kind to a monk after his first mass and his first sitting *ad skillam*. If we are to assume the wider meaning of the latter phrase it is impossible to determine what were the qualifications which a monk must possess or the period of probation through which he must pass before his promotion *ad skillam*. Islip was not thus advanced until he became Prior, when he must inevitably so sit; so that the qualification was evidently not that of the holding of monastic office, however important. Moreover a survey of the careers of a large number of monks shews that anything from four to more than thirty years from their profession might elapse before such promotion came. For example Kirton did not sit *ad skillam* until he became Abbot in 1440, thirty-two years after his first mass; while Thomas Gedney passed to the high table in 1421, within five years of his profession. Kirton indeed had spent some years of his monastic life at Oxford and never occupied the position of Prior, yet it would be expected that on one or other of his visits to Westminster he would be found to have been sitting at the high table at a far earlier date.

If, however, the narrower meaning of the phrase,

that of actually presiding in the Refectory, may be taken as indicating the occasion upon which *exenia* or complimentary gifts were made, the difficulty to some extent disappears. Actual seniority of profession would then determine the occasion of the gifts. A relatively young monk such as John Islip might have sat at the high table long before some accident found him as the senior monk present in the Refectory, and the same fate might befall one many years older than himself. Moreover it seems probable from the fact that two tables were reserved for the senior monks in the Refectory in addition to the table of the President that the narrower interpretation of the phrase as used at Westminster is the more correct. This is borne out also by the fact that the phrase itself is found not only in its ambiguous form as *primo sedente ad skyllam* but also as *primo presidente ad skyllam* which would seem to admit of no ambiguity at all. It is to be observed that the phrase is undoubtedly used in the narrower sense at Westminster at the close of the thirteenth century.

This digression is of some importance to a proper understanding of Islip's career. It might be supposed that his early advancement to important offices had awakened some jealousy in the hearts of his fellows and had thus delayed his admission to the high table until as Prior he could no longer be excluded from it. That this was not the case

must be evident from the fact that two years later the brethren themselves unanimously elected him to the highest office of all.

One further argument may be adduced. It is commonly said that the Abbot was solely responsible for the appointment of monks to the different offices of the monastery.* In the case of Westminster this general rule requires some modification. From the time of Abbot Crispin to Abbot Wenlock, that is to say from A.D. 1085 to 1307, it was indubitably the custom for the prior and Convent to select two to four monks from whom the Abbot might make his appointment to certain at least of the vacant offices. Since in all other respects the agreements between the Westminster Abbots and their monks continued in force in the centuries succeeding Abbot Wenlock, there is no reason to suppose from the lack of evidence that this particular custom changed. It may be assumed therefore with something more than probability that Islip represented the selection of the monastery at most stages of his advancement.

On becoming Prior Islip resigned his offices as Treasurer, Monk-Bailiff and Warden of the Churches, all of which on occasion would take him abroad from the cloister. He retained,

* cf. Abbot Butler: *Benedictine Monachism*, p. 199, quoting from Cardinal Gasquet; *English Monastic Life*, pp. 42—50.

however, the duties of the Cellarership, which was a more domestic office.

As Prior indeed he had to do the work which St. Benedict had designed for the Abbot. He must be in practice what the Abbot was in theory —the father of the Conventual family. As will appear later the Abbot, especially of such a monastery as Westminster, was apt to be drawn into the vortex of public affairs to an extent which left him little leisure for the essential duties of his position. To some extent also it must be admitted that the Prior did not share the full life of the brethren. He had a separate house at the end of the Dark Cloister running parallel to and south of the Refectory.

Islip himself has left little record of his own tenure of the office, but if the documents which attest the story of his successor may be taken as illustrative of the Prior's life in general, it must be assumed that his share in the common life was occasional rather than constant, while the existence of such officials as the Sub-prior and the third or fourth Priors points to a delegation of duties and a system which may have worked well in practice but was not consonant with the Benedictine ideal. Those who are familiar with the course of the development of the collegiate life which Henry VIII. designed for his new foundation at Westminster in after-days will have observed the same

forces at work in the gradual isolation of the higher officials from the common table and a somewhat quicker immersion in outside duties. It can hardly be doubted that such forces are disruptive in tendency, not necessarily of the body itself, but of the purpose and ideal for which it was called into being.

The Prior in fact found little difficulty in an occasional absence of days together from the monastery. A pilgrimage to the Rood of Grace at Boxley did not require any particular planning or arrangement, while the record of visitors entertained by "your mastership," as Prior Mane's faithful steward was wont to call him, shews the independent character of the hospitality which he exercised. Whatever may have been the frequency of his visits to the cloister Mane would seem seldom to have dined in the Refectory. He appears indeed as no unfit ruler of the house but he stands aloof from it none the less, a figure to be regarded by the younger brethren with more awe than love. There is nothing to shew that such a life was regarded as other than normal or that his immediate predecessors had lived in other fashion.

Fascet had been Abbot little more than a fortnight when he signed an indenture binding himself and the Convent to pay Henry VII. the sum of five hundred pounds, one hundred of which was to be paid at the following Christmas and the

remainder in two equal portions at the end of the ensuing years. The King had represented that he was about to be put to great expense both in obtaining the papal license for and the actual removal of the body of Henry VI. from Windsor to London. Moreover the "diuerse other many and grete charges that our said souverain Lord must bere by the chaunge and alteracion of suche thinges as his Highness . . . hadde ordeyned and purposed to have made and done within the said College of Wyndesore" formed an additional claim upon a Convent already somewhat put to it to find money for other purposes.

The total sum was, however, paid in the year 1500-1, and John Islip as the new Sacrist duly recorded it in his roll of account. The entry which he made was apt to be misleading. Translated it would run thus: "Paid for the removal of the body of the illustrious King Henry VI. from Windsor to the monastery of the Blessed Peter, Westminster." It was doubtless this entry that subsequently gave rise to the tradition that the actual removal took place and the body laid in some temporary resting-place until the new chapel should be built as its shrine. The fact that the papal brief for the removal was not granted until May 20th, 1504, would be by itself sufficient to disprove the tradition, but if further proof were needed it could be found in the Will of Henry VII., which was begun in

1509 and contained the note that the King proposes *right shortely to translate . . . the bodie and reliques of our Uncle of blessed memorie King Henry the VI^th.*

For some unknown reason the translation was never carried out. It has been suggested that the large sum of money demanded for canonisation coupled with Henry's parsimonious character proved sufficient to stay the project; but there is no evidence for this conjecture and it seems more reasonable to suppose that the canonisation was delayed until the new chapel should be sufficiently ready to receive the body, otherwise pilgrims would be flocking to Windsor rather than Westminster. Before the chapel was thus ready Henry VII. died, and it may well be that his successor had not the same interest in the matter as his father or the same concern to defend his title to the throne.

One further item of interest may be noted here. The privy purse expenses of Henry VII. contain payments amounting in all to more than sixty-eight pounds to Master Esterfelde for making the tomb of Henry VI. at Windsor, and a further payment to him of ten pounds for the actual conveyance of this tomb to Westminster. Its ultimate fate, however, was never recorded.

Whatever might be the final decision of the Convent Abbot Fascet can have had little doubt as to the proper person to succeed him. In a deed

which is undated but which belongs probably to the year 1499 he delegated to his Prior, John Islip, his full authority over the monastery, and Islip became Abbot in fact if not yet in name. His end was not far off, and in the summer of 1500 he died and was laid to rest in the Chapel of St. John Baptist.

In due course the royal license was issued to Islip as Prior to proceed to the election of an Abbot in his place. On October 26th the office of Abbot was formally declared vacant in the Chapter House. In addition to Islip some thirty-eight of the monks were present and also Dr. Richard Rawlyns, a notary, Thomas Chamberlayn, and two representatives of the law, Doctor Edward Vaughan and Dr. William Haryngton. The election was fixed to take place on the following day though deliberation might be prolonged if it seemed desirable. Mass of the Holy Spirit was then solemnly sung at the high altar and afterwards all assembled in Chapter.

The gathering of the brethren was larger by five than on the previous day, while Dr. Rawlyns, three legal representatives and a lay witness, Edmund Dudley, were in attendance. Dr. Rawlyns preached a solemn discourse on the text: *Instead of thy fathers thou shalt have children, whom thou mayest make princes.* "Come, Holy Ghost" was then sung, with the customary prayers following. The letters patent were read, the names of the brethren present scrutinised, proclamation made at the

Chapter House door that any who had legal interest in the election should come in, and then Islip as Prior solemnly warned any who lay under excommunication, suspension or interdict, or who were for any other reason disqualified to take part in the election, forthwith to depart.

Dr. Vaughan then formally inquired of the assembled Chapter by what method they desired the election to go forward. The reply was *per viam Spiritus Sancti*, and William Lambard, the senior of the monks present, nominated John Islip. The choice was immediately acclaimed by all the brethren without discussion or consultation of any kind.

Lambard at once proceeded to make record of the election. Brother John Islip, he wrote, was a man careful and discreet, an ornament to the priesthood in life and habit, wise alike in things spiritual and temporal, and anxious to preserve and defend the rights of the monastery of his choice. Procession was then formed to the high altar and *Te Deum* sung the while. On reaching the altar Dr. Vaughan made public proclamation of the election. The brethren then returned to the Chapter House where the two seniors present, Brothers Lambard and Charyng, were deputed to carry the formal announcement of his election to the Prior's lodging whither the Abbot-elect had retired. Islip proclaimed himself unworthy of such

high office but eventually consented to election *multipliciter se excusans*. He recorded his acceptance in this form:

"In the name of God, Amen. I, John Islip, monk of the monastery of St. Peter Westminster directly attached to the Roman Church, of the order of St. Benedict, vowed to the order and rule of the same in the said monastery and canonically elected Abbot thereof, unwilling to resist the divine will, at the urgent request of the Chapter of the said monastery and its proctors do consent to my election, in honour of Almighty God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Peter patron of the said monastery and the glorious Confessor St. Edward the King."

The Abbot-elect would seem to have celebrated the occasion by giving a modest dinner to the Convent if we may judge from the long list of articles of food purchased by the steward of his new household on that day. The cost amounted to seventeen shillings and ten pence and the list included "a potell of swet wyne"—bought perhaps to fill a loving-cup.

Some formalities, however, were necessary before the Abbot-elect could be installed. The papal confirmation had to be obtained as also various royal grants of the Abbot's temporalities. Some of the latter are dated November 13th and consist of mandates to the Crown escheators in various counties to deliver the temporalities in their hands.

Matters were sufficiently forward for the installation to be fixed for November 25th. The three days previous were spent by Islip at the Abbot's Manor of Neyte, close to Westminster, where various presents of food were made to him by his new tenants.

On the morning of the day *when my lord was stalled* he came from the Chapel of St. Mary Magdalen at the far end of Tothill Street, then one of the chief highways of Westminster, with a great number of nobles, friends and servants and was met in the Conventual cemetery just outside the west door of the church by five of the senior brethren, Charyng, Waterden, Langley, Holand and Borough. Waterden handed him the oath customarily taken by the Abbots to observe "all the rights, statutes and laudable constitutions and customs of the monastery." He first read it through in a low tone and then recited it in a loud and clear voice. Then there came to him the Sub-prior and the rest of the monks with book, cross and pastoral staff. He knelt and kissed the book and so was led in procession into the church where the installation was duly performed. He subsequently gave a banquet at which probably the whole Convent was entertained, its cost amounting to no less than £4 13s. 7d.

So he entered on his new dignities. He was but thirty-six years old and there were no less than

sixteen of the brethren who were his seniors in point of profession. Twenty years had seen him pass from the country-bred novice to the high position of a mitred Abbot at the opening of a century destined to bring to the Church changes greater than any that had happened to it since St. Augustine first landed on the shores of Kent.

CHAPTER V.

ISLIP AS ABBOT.

Following on his installation as Abbot, Islip was the recipient of various presents in money from the obedientiaries of the Abbey as well as of many in kind from friends outside.

The first month of office was spent quietly at Cheynygates and the earliest record of a visit abroad is contained in his steward's note that "this yere my lorde Abbot, the Prior, the monk bayly, and all the Convent kepe ther Crystemasse w^t^ my seyd lord Abbott at his maner of Neyte." The entertainment was of the most lavish character, in striking contrast to the relative frugality of the Abbot's ordinary household expenses. Two oxen at 13s. 4d. each, seventeen sheep at 1s. 6d. each, nine pigs at 2s. each, twenty-seven geese, twenty-three capons,—such were some of the purchases, while what may be called the bill for dessert came to £2 6s. 8d., the whole amounting to more than eight pounds.

For a time the new Abbot found leisure to audit

his household accounts and append his signature with its accustomed *rubrica* thereto, but he did not long continue the practice, perhaps because he found that he was being honestly served and more important matters were to hand. His steward records that the second Christmas was spent at Hendon "and maister prior and maister monk Bayly to gether at maister prior's place." The latter facts were no business of his, but we are glad of his gossiping pen and shall have occasion to quote him again.

It is important to notice an innovation in the monastic system which Islip continued but which was initiated by Estney. The story of the completion of the building of the nave will be told later, so that it need not be dwelt on now. In his anxiety for this work Estney on becoming Abbot in 1474 retained in his hands the two offices of Sacrist and Warden of the New Work, as bearing directly on the building operations. This retention was continued by Fascet and Islip in turn. All of them of course employed deputies to assist them but maintained control of the funds of the two offices.

Estney was the first Abbot to hold an office in the monastery, and it must argue well for his personal influence or popularity that he was allowed to do so. In an earlier century such action would have been strongly resented, so clearly defined were

the relative positions and functions of ruler and ruled.

It is a matter of no little difficulty to estimate the meaning and importance of such an innovation. It is possible to read into it a symptom of the declining vigour of monastic life, more especially in view of the fact that in the early sixteenth century the tendency was to unite various offices in one holder and so for many monks never to hold office at all. But it does not seem necessary to invest Estney's action with any such indication of decay in strength on the part of those over whom he ruled. The work of rebuilding the nave was the greatest enterprise of its kind which had ever been undertaken by the Abbot and Convent, and it might well be considered a sign of common sense that the two offices which were especially *ad hoc* should have been allowed by the Convent to be retained by the chief director and inspirer of the task in hand. Delay and friction may have occurred in the previous years when there was divided responsibility. But when all is said it must be admitted that the true significance of the innovation has not been adequately determined. For the purposes of the present story, however, there is this advantage that the rolls of the retained offices provide much additional material for noting Islip's personal activities.

At the time of Islip's accession the financial

management of the monastery must have given occasion for anxious thought. The payment of royal subsidies was shared between the incomes of the different offices and weighed heavily upon all, amounting roughly as it generally did to a five per cent. tax upon diminishing receipts. For four years tithes had decreased in value and in each of them the Sacrist's roll had shewn a deficit which in Islip's first year had fortunately to some extent been compensated for by an increase in the rents from Westminster property. An annual payment of fifty shillings from the Royal Exchequer for the renewal of candles about the tomb of Edward I.—a payment which had been made for centuries—was discontinued in 1497, and not for seventeen years did Islip secure its revival and then only for a time. Offerings at the different altars which in 1496 had amounted to more than forty-eight pounds had in 1500 shrunk to less than thirty-six.

Until the year 1509 Islip was unable to shew any credit balance in the Sacrist's account, though he gradually reduced the deficit. In that year, however, occasions of special profit arose. The offerings at the burial of Henry VII. came to more than one hundred and forty-eight pounds, those at the funeral of the lady Margaret his mother to twenty-two, and the oblations at the High Altar at the subsequent coronation of Henry VIII. and Katharine of Arragon to forty-seven.

Islip, however, in the earlier years of his abbacy did not regard the need for rigid economy as any excuse for the restriction of services. On the other hand he would seem to have multiplied the number of masses said in the church, for while in his first year nineteen thousand "breads" were purchased for this purpose no less than twenty-nine thousand were required in the second. In 1504 considerable outlay was made on the repair of vestments, lamps and other ornaments of the church, and there is in these years every evidence that there was no slackening at least of the external observances. Small items of expenditure have their interest. Henry VII. would seem to have had a private apartment in the church, for in 1491 keys had been bought for his seat and closet therein, while in 1504 there is a payment of four pence for "teynterhokys and cordes for the travers of the lord king in the church," and a further expenditure of two pence for rosemary bought for the King.

The Abbey church has been the scene of many a service of striking splendour in the course of its long history but few of them can have rivalled in curious impressiveness that which took place in November of the year 1515. Wolsey had attained the goal of his immediate though not of his ultimate desires, and on the fifteenth of the month his cardinal's hat was brought in solemn procession through London to the Abbey church, where Islip

and eight other Abbots received it and solemnly laid it upon the High Altar. On Sunday the 18th Wolsey, attended by nobles and gentlemen, came from York Place to the church, where mass was solemnly sung by the Archbishop of Canterbury. There were present the Archbishops of Armagh and Dublin, the Bishops of Lincoln, Exeter, Winchester, Ely, Durham, Norwich and Llandaff, beside the Abbots of Westminster, St. Albans, Bury, Glastonbury, Reading, Gloucester, Winchcombe, Tewkesbury, and the Prior of Coventry. The sermon was preached by Colet, Dean of St. Paul's, who is recorded to have said that "a cardinal represents the order of seraphim which continually burneth in the love of the glorious Trinity, and for these considerations a cardinal is apparelled only in red, which colour only betokeneth nobleness"—surely adulation enough even for Wolsey's ambitious spirit! The final prayers and benediction were pronounced by the Archbishop of Canterbury over Wolsey's prostrate form as "he lay grovelling" before the High Altar, and at last the hat was placed on his head. It is interesting for those acquainted with Abbey traditions to note that in the recessional the cross was carried before the new cardinal though he was not yet a papal legate, while no such distinction was accorded to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Abbey of Westminster was proud of its

exemption from all but papal jurisdiction. No bishops made there any disciplinary visitations. Wolsey became legate in 1518 and Polydore Vergil records that he made a visitation of the Abbey in that year. Of this the Abbey records shew no trace though notice was given of such visitation by Wolsey and Campeggio.

One document (a copy) which still survives and refers to that year belongs probably to a later occasion. It is a roll on which appears as title *A Supplicacon of a monk of Westm' to y^e^ beshop of Rome.* Its preamble begins:—"Pitteously complaynyth unto your most holly ffatherhed, well of all remedy, hed and superyor of the spirytuall powr, your pour suppliant and orator." The monk remains anonymous, but his complaint is that in 1518 when Islip was Abbot and William Mane Prior it fortuned the said Prior to be robbed and spoiled of certain goods by a servant and kinsman of his own, "so being forth at a place of his called Belsaes." When tidings was brought to Mane "he sayd strayth that it was my arte and dede and put it holy to me that I had Robbed hym of lij lib. of plate and so incontynet went unto the abbot then lyeng at Hendon . . . . uppon the which I was ffet owt of my chamber by Dane John Chorysshe then beyng his chapelayn which brougt me unto the prior, which prior commandyd me unto ward in a sertayn chamber where I dyd contynue withowte

bed . . . . untyll the commnyg hom of the Abbot, at whose commyng I was examynd and then the prior had nothyng to say unto me but askyd me wher I had the iiij lib. that I did hend unto marshall of Barmysay wher as this I declaryd me to have it by the deth of my father . . . . the prior comayndyd me ayenn unto the pryson untyll he had made dew prove thereof and in the meane season thabbot did return unto Hendon and at his commyng ayenn whan the trowgh began to Appere they beyng asshamed of the sayd slander the abbot cam unto me and sayd Brother A.B. wyll you put this matter unto my handis and I promyse yew I shall se yow have a great mense made, And forbycause I was under his obbedience I was content so to do but as yet I had never nothyng but toke by that means a great and greavous sykenesse, at which tym of syckness it cam unto my lot to syng the chapter masse, but I beyng dyseasyd durst not nor could not take it uppon me but yet w^t. compulcion he cawsyd me to do it, so it fortuned the sayd day at masse at the Gospell tyme by the reason of that sycnesse so takyn to be so sycke that I sownyd at the Auter where at they were fayn to cut my gyrdell to revyue me, so that after masse as sone as I cam in to the revestery I was compelled to vomyt . . .

". . . . And after that toke a sycnesse which held me iiij yeres. And where as ther is a howse cawlyd the farmary to kepe syck men in to the

which ther is a lowyd l lib, by the yere to be put to that use wher as every oon beyng sycke iij d. by the day wt· sertyn fagottis and other thyngis. your sayd suppliant had nether but lay at his owne cost utterly to his undoyng and to the poverysshement of his ffriendis . . . . But uppon a malyciouse mynd the pryor that now is informyd the abbot so that he sayd openly at the chapeter that I was a gret dysoymaler and was no more syck than his horse yet he discharged me there. And so after incontenent wt· sutche small comfortis as I had and purchased of my ffrendis I did send for mr· Docter yarkeley doctr· barlet Doctr· ffreman mr· Grene mr· Pawle which opynly did prove me to be infected with dyvers sycknesse whereof the lest were able to kyll a Ryht strong man, the Abot heryng of thys comanydy me to ly in the subchamber and there I lay iij quarteris of a yere and vj weekis withowt anny succoure of the howse . . . . but had utterly peryeshed but for my ffrendis . . ."

The suppliant goes on to ask that bulls may be issued commanding the monastery on pain of excommunication to give him the first benefice that shall happen to be vacant so that it be of the value of twenty pounds with his portion, monk's pension, stall in choir and voice in Chapter on a day of election.

It is unfortunate that the name of the author of this realistic petition cannot be recovered, but the

petition itself alone survives. We have only one side of the case and it may have been true that he was no more sick than the Abbot's horse! It may be that this petition was presented in 1525 when Wolsey signified his intention of holding a visitation of the Abbey. Islip wrote a reply to the cardinal promising to be present with all his monks. He admits the need of such visitations, for abbots, abbesses, and priors have become lax in their mode of life and observance of rule, and lukewarm in their examples; while regulars who ought to be models to the laity in life, in morals and good works, lead lives little corresponding thereto, to the great scandal of many. The letter is a disinterested comment on the monasticism of the day but it would be foolish to draw any sweeping conclusion from it. Islip had conducted such visitations himself, and in 1516 had seen fit to suspend a Prior of Malvern. No records of the result of Wolsey's visit seem to remain beyond its cost, and doubtless he found little upon which to comment.

The Benedictine custom of sending certain of their monks to Oxford has already been mentioned. Towards the close of the thirteenth century Gloucester College had been established there, to which a few years later Westminster students began to be admitted. Among those in residence there in 1522 was Thomas Barton, already a Doctor of Divinity and about to become Prior of the students

of the college. An interesting document survives in his handwriting which may be allowed to speak for itself:

"This byll testyfythe y^{t} we V scholars wth other V wth us of y^{e} brethrens of Gloster colege hathe expendyd yn y^{e} observaunce of holy sent Edwardis o^{r} patronys servisse kept at yslipe yn hys chappell & of y^{e} dyryge & massys kept y^{r} yn y^{e} paryshe churche for y^{e} sowlys of y^{e} parentis of o^{r} most worshypfull spirituall father y^{n} god y^{e} abotte of Wesminster the summe of x^{s} the yere of o^{r} lord a mccccccxxij^{ti} the xvth day next after mykyl day

by me rudely wryt
Dan Thomas Barton
monk of Wesmynster"

Immediately upon Barton's appointment as Prior of the students Islip made him a present of over four pounds, a typical instance both of his personal generosity and of the interest which he shewed in the absent sons of his house.

In Islip's time the monastery was represented also at Cambridge at the hostel called Buckingham College, which was founded in 1428 for Benedictine students drawn from monasteries in the eastern counties. The connection of Westminster with Cambridge began in practice in 1499, just about the time when Islip as Prior received the delegation of Abbot Fascet's powers. His interest in the Cambridge students is evident from a letter which he

wrote about the year 1524 to John Thaxted, Abbot of Walden, calling his attention to the condition of their college which was without a rector, and expressing a wish that John Hastley, a student from Selby Abbey, might have leave to pursue his legal studies at St. Nicholas' Inn. The generosity of the Lady Margaret to the university was probably not without its influence in strengthening the connection with Westminster.

Islip, like many of his predecessors, had some unfortunate experiences in connection with the Gatehouse prison, for the security of which he was personally responsible. In 1506 one John Calcote, Gentleman of London, who was in his charge on various accusations of felony, managed to escape from custody, and Islip was accordingly fined. Two years later George Wolmer, Yeoman of Lingfield, fled for sanctuary to St. Mary Overy, Southwark. He was outlawed, but later on was arrested in England. He pleaded benefit of clergy and was handed over to Islip's care. On his subsequent escape a Middlesex jury found a charge of negligent custody duly proved.

Yet the keeping of the gaol in spite of these and other instances of resultant trouble would seem to have been profitable, for Islip was diligent in defending not only the rights of sanctuary but also the privileges of receiving accused folk whether clerical or lay arrested within his jurisdiction, a

diligence observable in subsequent centuries in those who took his place, though not his office. He was jealous too of his position as Abbot of Westminster, with all that that high office involved. For example, it chanced that he was present at a Chapter of the Prior and Convent of Greater Malvern in 1529, perhaps on a visitation, and he took the opportunity of professing certain of their novices, but he was careful to make it understood that he was in no way detracting from the old arrangement by which the Malvern monks must make their profession at Westminster.

The various inventories of the time and the records of the Augmentation Office and Exchequer bear testimony to his generous gifts of vestments and ornaments to the Abbey church. The elaboration of his unfinished mortuary roll witnesses to the esteem in which his Convent held him. He was the last of the great Abbots of Westminster, a not ignoble line, and it may confidently be asserted that his rule will bear comparison with that of any of his predecessors.

It is natural to scan the Abbey records of his time for signs of the approaching cataclysm and equally natural perhaps to exaggerate the significance of their presence or absence. Among these records the signs are few. As long as Islip lived one might suppose from them that monastic life at Westminster eight years before the dissolu-

tion of the monastery was pursuing the same even and profitable course that it had pursued half a century earlier when he first entered the monastery, and indeed that in some respects it was shewing even greater vigour. The enthusiasm for the internal work of the rebuilding of the nave and the external stimulus of the foundation of Henry VII. do not point to a community anticipating any breaking of its bonds.

Yet it must be confessed that the materials for an accurate and well-considered judgment are lacking. If a verdict must be passed on the evidence which exists it would be in favour of the supposition just mentioned. At the same time it must not be supposed that the community was blind as to the general trend of the times or oblivious to the possibilities that awaited it.

Two things stand out in the last year of Islip's life as pointing to the fact that the Convent was facing forces too strong for it. In 1531 it was paying an annual bribe to Thomas Cromwell, a payment which was euphemistically called "a fee granted to him for the term of his natural life," the Sacrist's share of which was £6 13s. 4d. The second indication lies in the unequal bargain made by Islip with the King in the exchange of property. After Wolsey's fall the King had annexed York Place, ignoring the fact that it was the property of the northern archbishopric and not that of

Wolsey himself. The larger portion of the residential part of the Palace of Westminster had been destroyed by fire in 1512 and the King proposed enormous extensions to Whitehall, as his new palace was now to be called. For these he must acquire the houses on both sides of the street to the north and south of the existing buildings. Most of these houses belonged to the Abbey and it can be easily imagined that Islip would be unable to withhold his assent to the scheme. He was employed along with Thomas Cromwell to pay compensation to evicted tenants, and in this way a sum of more than eleven hundred pounds was disbursed. But the Convent itself received no adequate compensation. Henry indeed gave it the Priory of Poughley in Berkshire, one of the smaller houses which Wolsey had dissolved. Poughley had been founded about 1160 by Ralph de Chaddleworth as a house for Austin Canons and in theory its revenues amounted to about seventy pounds. In actual practice the Abbey were worse off by some fifteen pounds a year.

It remains only to note one or two instances of Islip's activities. When the ancient college of St. Martin-le-Grand in London came into the possession of the Abbey at the beginning of the sixteenth century Islip drew up new statutes for it, and the records of his dealing with this foundation shew evidence of a shrewd business mind. From time

to time his name occurs in connection with the General Council of Benedictines of which he was President in 1527. On this occasion he issued a commission to William, Abbot of Gloucester, to hold a visitation of the Abbey of Malmesbury where there had been a rebellion of the members of the house against their Abbot. Towards the end of his life he was one of the royal chaplains, but the record of his appointment does not appear.

Islip died on Sunday, May 12th, 1532, at his manor house of Neyte, and was buried four days later in the centre of his own chapel. So great was the public interest in his funeral that its train is said to have stretched from Neyte to Tothill Street. The Abbot of Bury officiated at the interment and pontificated at the mass of requiem on the day following, the sermon being preached by the Vicar of Croydon. The references to Islip's work as a builder which Hacket makes in his life of Bishop Williams may be very inaccurate, but there is no reason to question his estimate of Islip's character as "a devout servant of Christ and of a wakeful conscience." The last great Abbot of Westminster, it may be truly said of him that he was *felix opportunitate mortis*. His latter days may well have been full of anxiety, but he did not live to see the storm break or to suffer in the vast upheavals which were so soon to follow and which assuredly would have broken his heart. But three

days after his death the clergy in Convocation were forced to consent that they would neither enact nor enforce new canons without the royal initiative and assent. On the very day of his burial Sir Thomas More handed back the Great Seal to the King. Islip's funeral was "the funeral of the Middle Ages."

CHAPTER VI.

ISLIP IN PUBLIC LIFE.

The personality of the Abbot of Westminster can seldom have been a matter of indifference to the reigning Sovereign. The mere proximity of Court and monastery would alone be sufficient to ensure some degree of friendship or provoke some measure of antagonism, and instances are not wanting of both. But when it is remembered that the Abbey church was the place of burial of many and the place of coronation of all the Kings; that it contained the saintly relics of one and owed its very structure to another, it is not surprising that at times Abbot and King should be brought together in intimate contact.

When Islip first became Abbot every circumstance combined to bring such contact about. Henry VII. was half ready with the plans for his new chapel and Islip's enthusiasm as a builder must already have been obvious. It may be supposed that Islip had already attracted the royal notice by his share in the matter of the proposed translation of Henry VI., and the King's assent to his election would seem to have been given readily enough if we may judge by the relative lack of

delay in issuing the royal writs that dealt with the Abbot's temporalities.

One small incident suggests that the new Abbot soon became on intimate terms with the King. Islip's cook had evidently a reputation for the excellence of his marrowbone puddings, for presents of such to the Lord Chamberlain and others of his friends were not infrequent. Before Islip had been Abbot for six months we find in his household accounts the record of the purchase of "ij marybons for ij podyngis for the Kyng." The cost was only two pence, but in skilled hands the value was evidently more. The present of a buck from one to the other would be a matter of no surprise, but there is a certain intimacy, indefinable perhaps but none the less real, implied in so trivial a gift as that of a marrowbone pudding.

A few weeks later the Abbot's steward notes that "the Kingis grace dyned at Cheynygate." The cost of the entertainment was only 17s. 4d. and the fare provided was by no means elaborate. It was on a Friday so no meat was served, and the only purchases unusual to the Abbot's accounts were wine and strawberries which together cost 3s. 8d., a barrel of ale for 2s. and a "potell of wyne for to Sowse ffysche w$^{t.}$" for 4d. The endowment of the King's new chapel and the services to be performed in it when finished would have been a topic of interest to both and in itself have provided sufficient

matter for conversation. A further instance of friendly relations may be found in the royal presents to Islip of two tuns of wine yearly which began in the year 1501.

Islip's first entry into public life, so far as can be discovered, must date from his appointment in 1504 as treasurer of the hospital of the Savoy, then about to be rebuilt by Henry VII. It does not appear that the Abbot had any particular share in the work beyond the actual guardianship of the funds. The money came to him in sealed bags which were probably deposited in the undercroft of the Chapter House. He might not deliver them over without the royal warrant in Henry's lifetime or an order signed by seven at least of Henry's executors after his death. In 1512 he had as much as ten thousand pounds in his keeping, the last instalment of which he paid over late in the year 1515 when his connection with the hospital came apparently to an end.

The trust which Henry VII. placed in him was continued by his successor, and in September, 1513, Islip appears as a member of the Privy Council of Henry VIII. Thomas Wolsey had been appointed to the Council two years before. The Abbot and the future Cardinal must, however, have been acquainted at an earlier date, for in 1505 Wolsey had been appointed a chaplain to Henry VII. In 1507 the Abbot and Convent had granted to Sir

Richard Empson the parsonage and adjoining gardens of St. Bride's, Fleet Street, and when Empson fell the grant was given to Wolsey, who thus became a tenant of the Abbey. Moreover both Islip and Wolsey were among the personal friends of Sir Reginald Bray, a favoured adviser of Henry VII.

Reference has been made elsewhere to Islip's legal training. This was doubtless responsible for his appointment in 1510 as a trier of petitions of England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland, an office which he continued to fill in the years that followed. In 1519 Wolsey deputed him along with others to hear the causes of poor men depending in the Star Chamber, while in 1512 and subsequent years his name appears on the Commission of Peace for the County of Middlesex.

Among the minor activities of these years may be included Islip's work in 1524 as a Collector for Middlesex on behalf of the loan for the war with France, and in 1526 as a Commissioner of Sewers from East Greenwich to Gravesend, work in which he was associated among others with Sir Thomas More and Lord Cobham. It is interesting to note in the Navy List for 1513 the Abbot of Westminster as part owner of the ship *Kateryn Fortileza*, doubtless one of that gallant squadron which swept the Channel under Sir Edmund Howard and blockaded the port of Brest.

Little record remains of any activity Islip may have displayed in Parliament. As a mitred abbot he was summoned to the assembly which met early in 1515, and there is some evidence to shew that in 1523 he was not a silent member, but his record in this connection is to be sought in the work of Parliament in general rather than in individual effort.

Elusive references to Islip in public documents are not infrequent in the second decade of the sixteenth century, but it is not easy to place them in their historical setting. For instance we find that he had evidently made a loan of some magnitude to his fellow Privy Councillor, the Earl of Shrewsbury, but the purpose of the loan cannot be discovered and we note only the difficulty which Shrewsbury had in making repayment and the not unusual mode of behaviour on the part of the defaulting debtor of sending a present of venison in place of an instalment of the debt.

At this time Islip would seem to have stood just on the outer fringe of public affairs. He dined with Wolsey in 1516 to meet the ambassadors from Scotland, and in the summer of 1520, when the mission from France was being shewn the sights of London, he "enterteigned" the three gentlemen that composed it with "right goodly chere," for among those sights was the King's new chapel at Westminster, not to mention the Hospital of the

Savoy. So, too, he visited the Princess Mary at Richmond and is able to report with the rest of the Privy Council that she "is right merry and in prosperous health and state, daily exercising herself in virtuous pastimes." The visit was followed by gifts of puddings, for the bringing of which the Abbot's servants were duly tipped by the Princess. Again, on the occasion of the important visit of the Emperor Charles V. to England in May, 1522, Islip was summoned along with his brethren of Bury, Canterbury and Bermondsey, to attend Wolsey at Dover to meet him, but this must not be interpreted to imply that Islip had any share in the important matters that were to hand. It would be but a compliment to his orthodox majesty to be met by representative Churchmen and to the Churchmen themselves to be asked to meet him.

Among the problems of the earlier Tudor period was one of interest at the present time. There are no unimpeachable statistics as to the proportion of English land which was held by the Church but that proportion was undoubtedly large. Many of the monasteries were landlords on a large scale and yet were suffering the pinch of severe poverty. The land was becoming denuded of tenants and rapidly passing from the plough to pasture. Increasing demands from the royal exchequer upon monastic houses aggravated the evil and it has been

well said that "debt with no chance of redemption weighed heavily upon all."

It was a problem that Islip could view both with personal knowledge and official interest. It was a natural but at the same time an anomalous appointment which placed Islip in 1516 on a Commission among whose terms of reference were inquiries as to what towns, hamlets, houses and buildings had been destroyed since 1489; what and how much land in cultivation in that year had since been converted into pasture; what number of parks had since been inclosed, and what land had been added to existing parks. Islip was concerned in this inquiry with Middlesex only, but that county included his own Manor of Hendon as well as other portions of the abbatial property, not to mention manors such as Ashford which belonged to his Convent.

In 1522 was levied the first of a series of loans designed to defray the costs of ineffective foreign wars and Islip was associated with Sir Andrew Wyndsore and Thomas Docwra, the Prior of the Order of St. John, as a Commissioner for Middlesex. Theirs was the unpopular task of making a list of all the residents in the county who possessed a yearly income of twenty pounds in goods or land, of ascertaining the total value of their property and assessing the tax due from them by way of loan. But if Islip had thus to deal with

others he did not escape himself. His own contribution was one thousand pounds, equalling that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, a sum which by now he could ill afford. At the same time he had to look forward to the payment of his share of an annual grant levied upon the whole spirituality of the kingdom for the King's expenses in France.

In 1525 Islip was sent by Wolsey to inquire into the affairs of the Abbey of Glastonbury. Abbot Richard Beere had died and considerable delay had occurred in electing his successor. Finally the forty-seven monks decided to remit the appointment to Wolsey who selected Richard Whiting, then Chamberlain of the Abbey, for the vacant office, doubtless on Islip's recommendation. It was perhaps well that Islip did not live to see the tragic fate that was to overtake the new Abbot.

Another side of Islip's later life is seen in his occasional presence at the trial of those accused of holding or promulgating heretical doctrine. It is easy to-day to enlarge upon the bigotry and intolerance of the judges at such trials, and to make much of the unreliable stories of men such as Foxe. It is less easy but it is imperative for a proper understanding to make the necessary effort of imagination and place oneself in the position of men faced with the spread of opinions which were subversive of all that they believed true and all that they held dear, opinions which they thought to be

destructive of a social order which they had long prized. It is foolish to defend them on the ground that they but found men guilty or not guilty of offences for which the civil and not the ecclesiastical arm awarded the punishment. They would have scorned such a plea in their own defence. It is better to try to understand the point of view which could place men of such gentle character as Thomas More in the position of apparent persecutors. The old order was changing, and the phenomena which accompany such changes, whether ecclesiastical or social, are apt to be the same in every age though they find expression in different modes of action. It is the form of expression which characterises the age rather than the phenomena which produce it.

Islip's first connection with such matters appears to have been in 1526, when Wolsey appointed him to search for heretics among the Hanseatic merchants in London. The search was apparently successful, for he presided together with the Bishop of Bath and Wells at the trial of one Hans Ellerdope, the main accusation against whom was the possession of one of Luther's prohibited treatises. The trial took place probably in the Chapter House of the Abbey, for the Prior, the Archdeacon, and another monk were all present. Ellerdope protested that he could neither speak nor understand Latin. He had not therefore read a single page of the book but had refrained from

burning it because it was not his own property. He had found it in the chamber of one of his master's agents on whose death he had taken possession of it. The issue of the trial does not appear but it seems probable that Ellerdope was acquitted.

In 1527 the Chapter House was definitely the scene of a trial. On this occasion Wolsey, attended by a long array of bishops, lawyers and others, presided there at the trial of one Thomas Bilney for heretical pronouncements. Bilney is only of interest as being, according to Foxe, "a Cambridge man and the first Framer of that University in the knowledge of Christ." More interesting would it be to have heard the talk of the monastery upon the trial which was taking place in its very centre.

In the last two years of his life Islip was connected with two more such trials, both of which were held in the Consistory Court in St. Paul's Cathedral and were presided over by the Bishop of London. One of these was that of Richard Bayfield, a renegade monk of Bury, against whom thirteen articles of offence were alleged. The more important items in the indictment were the importation of the works of Luther and of divers other heretics, and the holding of opinions contrary to Holy Church. The Abbots of Westminster and Waltham together with certain of the nobility and others assisted the Bishop at the trial. Bayfield

was found guilty and handed over to the Mayor and Sheriffs of London. In due course he suffered at the stake. The second trial was that of a leather-seller, John Tewkesbury, who came to the same end, but in this case Islip seems only to have been present at the first hearing.

But if this aspect of Islip's public life is little calculated to attract the sympathies of more tolerant times still less perhaps is the part which he played in the matter of the King's divorce. It was but a minor part, but there can be little doubt as to Islip's views in the case. No sadder fate fell to any woman in English history than came to Katharine of Arragon. Yet sympathy is apt to outrun judgment, and the easily formed verdict of all but the student dwells on the pathos of her story, makes much of the King's sensual inclinations, and is entirely uninterested in and impatient of the problems and niceties of ecclesiastical law.

To attempt some defence of Islip's action is not necessarily to attempt the same for Henry, though the efforts of the one were enlisted in the service of the other. To a Churchman such as Islip, though not to the Statesman such as Wolsey, there was but one point at issue in the matter and that was the legality of the original dispensation for the marriage which Pope Julius II. had granted. This can hardly be too strongly emphasised if strict justice is to be done to men such as he was. In

this connection it is to be noted that eight of the foreign universities to whom the question was submitted and as to the general impartiality of whose judgment there can be little question decided that the Pope's dispensation was null and void. The verdicts of the English universities in Henry's favour and those of the Spanish against him may be neglected as not uninfluenced by questions of expediency, but it is impossible to ignore the importance of the decision of the others.

Islip was present on two famous occasions in the year 1529: on May 31st, when the papal commission was presented to Cardinals Wolsey and Campeggio by the Bishop of Lincoln and a citation issued for the King and Queen to appear before their Court, and on June 18th, when the King appeared by proxies and Katharine attended in person to protest against the Cardinal's jurisdiction. In the furtherance of the King's suit Islip was employed with others to search for documents among the royal papers and to report on others in the possession of Garter King of Arms.

On July 13th, 1530, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal sent a petition to Clement VII. praying him to grant the divorce "if it can be granted with justice." This petition was signed by both Archbishops, by four Bishops and by twenty-two Abbots of whom Islip was one. The Pope's difficulties in the matter are well known and the story of Islip's

connection with it may be concluded with the mention of the letter which the King wrote on July 10th, 1531, telling Benet to suggest to the Pope that if he were afraid of the Emperor Charles, as he undoubtedly was, the Archbishop of Canterbury might be appointed to judge of the matter. With the Archbishop might be associated the Abbot of Winchcombe or the Abbot of Westminster, "a good old father." This suggestion of course came to nothing and Islip did not live to see the matter finally determined.

Some time, however, before Henry's letter Wolsey had died. Before his fall it had seemed for a moment that others would be involved with him among whom was Islip. In one of the indictments of Wolsey under the *Statute of Præmunire*, an undated copy of which is in the archives of the Abbey, Islip was also charged. After setting forth the accusations against Wolsey the document may be translated somewhat thus:—

"Nevertheless John, Abbot of the monastery of St. Peter, Westminster, little weighing the said statute, verily indeed setting it at naught, scheming and seeking after the said Cardinal in all his evil deeds, joined himself to him in a fuller and more extravagant use of his said powers and pretended legatine authority, and took him as his guide and almost as his tutor and gradually undermined the laws of this realm and at last almost extinguished

the same, with the result that the aforesaid Cardinal bore himself the more loftily and insolently in his legatine state and dignity. Upon a day at Westminster the said Abbot submitted himself to the Cardinal and accepted and approved the several legatine faculties and professed obedience to the same Cardinal and promised it by a binding oath. And also he promised him the annates of his exempt monastery right up to the Feast of the Annunciation, 20 Henr. VIII., and caused him to be paid in full at Westminster. And so the said Abbot abetted the said Cardinal in his contempt of the King . . ."

Præmunire was a convenient weapon in the King's hands and he was graciously pleased to pardon Islip with various others against whom similar indictments had been laid. The pardon in Islip's case may have facilitated the acquisition by the King of lands on which he had cast a covetous eye, the story of which has already been told.

Such is the record of the part played in public affairs by a Westminster abbot in the later history of the monastery. Scanty as it is and disconnected, it will yet be seen how that public life from which he could hardly escape must have severed him from the spiritual duties which the Rule of his Order enjoined upon him. In justice to him it must be said that he was the victim of a system which had developed too far for him to be able to check it.

CHAPTER VII.

ISLIP AS A BUILDER.

When Islip died in 1532 the Abbey Church of St. Peter, Westminster, was already (with the exception of Hawkesmoor's addition of the incongruous western towers in the eighteenth century) substantially the church that exists to-day, but in order to understand Islip's contribution to the buildings as well as the structure erected to some extent independently of his personal initiative, it is necessary to go back to the time when Henry of Reims produced his plan for the new church which Henry III. had designed to erect on the site where for nearly two centuries the old Norman buildings of the Confessor had stood.

In the year 1220 a Lady Chapel had been begun at the east end of the Norman church, and when twenty-five years later the Norman apse had to make way for Henry III.'s new structure the Lady Chapel must have been incorporated into the plan.

When the King died the presbytery, choir, and transepts had been completed. In 1298 a disastrous fire destroyed the greater part of the Conventual buildings, and thus work and money which might have gone to the completion of the church were diverted to the rebuilding of the monastery.

For a century the Norman Nave served the Gothic church, but about the year 1365 the rebuilding of the Nave was seriously undertaken on the initiative of Simon Langham, who had been Abbot from 1349 to 1362 and subsequently Bishop of Ely, Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal. The story of Langham's generosity does not belong to the present narrative and it must suffice to say that when Islip entered the monastery in 1480 a beginning was being made with the vaulting of three of the four westernmost bays, while the final bay was already raised to the triforium level. Abbot Estney's enthusiasm for the work is obvious to any who can read between the lines in what are designed to be simple records of receipts and expenditure, and there can be little doubt that Islip caught the infection of that enthusiasm in the course of his association with the Abbot as his Chaplain. Abbot Fascet's association with the work was honourable if short, and consisted mainly in generously wiping out debts the payment of which he might legitimately have charged on the fabric fund. It is not true as stated in Hacket's life of

Bishop Williams that Islip was responsible for the whole rebuilding of the nave, but his was certainly the glory of its completion.

Meanwhile at the other end of the church building of an entirely different character was going on. It is hardly possible to emphasise too strongly the contrast. At the west end were builders "original enough not to seek after originality in their work," continuing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the style and plan laid down by Henry of Reims in the middle of the thirteenth. At the east end the new Lady Chapel was being erected with all the glories of fan tracery in the most elaborate development of the Perpendicular. If further contrast be desired it can be found in Islip's contemporary building of the Jesus Chapel, roughly midway in position and style between the severe and the ornate beauties of the opposite ends of the church.

The west front of the church as Islip left it at his death may be seen in two pictures. The former of these is an inset into the elaborate capital letter which should have begun the word *Titulus* in Islip's mortuary roll, destined unfortunately never to be carried further. Here on the northern tower of the nave stands the great wheel by means of which the heavy stones were raised. It is perhaps no great matter if this picture seems to shew the southern tower in a somewhat more advanced stage than

Hollar depicted it in his engravings of 1653 and 1655.

In 1502 the Chapel of St. Erasmus was dismantled and the old Lady Chapel demolished. The image and canopy of the Saint were placed by Islip over what is now the entrance of St. John the Baptist's Chapel; and on January 24th, 1503, Islip, attended by a distinguished company, laid the foundation of the King's new chapel.

With the disappearance of the old chapel went also the tombs of Abbot Berkyng and Queen Katharine of Valois, Henry's "graunt Dame of right noble memorie." Her coffin was to lie unburied for more than two centuries and a half. Within less than three weeks from the laying of the stone Henry's wife, Elizabeth of York, died at the Tower of London. Her body was brought in solemn procession a few days later as far as Charing Cross, where it was met by the Abbots of Westminster and Bermondsey in full pontificals with the Convent of the former all vested in black copes. After the solemn censing of the corpse the procession moved onwards to the Abbey church and the funeral service with a sermon by the Bishop of Rochester was duly performed. Then comes a gap in the story, for the site of her immediate burial is unknown. Six years later her husband directed in his Will that the body of the Queen "be translated from the place where it nowe is buried and brought

and laide with oure bodye." This was of course done, but as to the year and manner of it the records are perplexingly silent.

In the building of the new chapel the King's mother, Margaret, Countess of Richmond, took considerable interest. At the end of the year 1496 she had endowed a chantry for herself at the Shrine of St. Edward, and there mass was said daily for her good estate during life and for her soul after death. She had planned also to found a chantry at Windsor in the new work there, but it does not seem to have come into being, and it is possible, though there is no evidence to prove it, that with the adverse judgment given in the matter of the body of Henry VI. her eyes turned like those of her son towards Westminster. It is certain that from Easter, 1505, a weekly mass was being said for her in the new foundation and it may therefore be supposed that the south aisle, rightly called the Lady Margaret's Chapel, must have been completed by that date. It is true that about the same time she had provided for masses to be said at the old Lady Altar on the north side of the church until Henry the Seventh's Chapel should be finished, but entries begin to occur referring to the "King's mother's chapel" which preclude the possibility of any other identification.

This weekly mass fell to the monks in turn and the celebrant received three shillings and four

pence, which seems a generous endowment. It is noteworthy that one shilling was being paid at this time for the weekly mass for Abbot Estney, probably in the Chapel of St. John Evangelist where he was buried, though the altar is not specified.

The Lady Margaret was indeed a generous benefactress of the new foundation. She gave to the Abbot and Convent the churches of Cheshunt and Swineshead, of the yearly value of more than fifty-three pounds, for the special purposes of the chantries, and also various lands at West Drayton and elsewhere, the proceeds of which the Abbot was to spend in the salaries of divinity readerships at the universities, while in her Will she made gifts of various ornaments to "oure chapell at Westminster" as well as assigning legacies for masses. She is stated to have built an almshouse for poor women in the Almonry by the Chapel of St. Anne.

On St. Peter's day, 1509, she died in the Abbot's house, and Bolton, Prior of St. Bartholomew's, was charged with the erection of her tomb. The Sacrist of that year records the receipt of twenty-two pounds in mass-pence at her funeral.

The arrangements for the new foundation were of the most elaborate character. For his own guidance Islip found it necessary to summarise the long indenture made between the King and himself. Apart from the worship in the chapel itself Henry

VII. was to be remembered daily both at the high mass and the Chapter mass. Ultimately the masses in the King's chapel were to be said only by bachelors or doctors of divinity, though the Abbot, Prior, and Monk-Bailiff were to be excused this qualification.

Accordingly the Abbot was bidden to cause the Oxford students of his monastery to take these degrees as soon as might be and within three months thereafter to appoint them to the service of the King's masses. Three additional monks above the present number of the monastery were to be acquired and placed on the new foundation to say each a mass daily for the King's welfare in life and death. These three masses were to be said at the altar "under the lantern place" until the chapel should be ready. The greatest bell was to be rung for forty strokes or above a quarter of an hour before each of these masses and from noon till one o'clock before the preaching of certain "solemne sermondis" appointed for various feasts and fasts. Once a year every priest in the monastery was to say a mass of requiem with special collects and every lay-brother the psalter of David or our Lady. Needless to say the most elaborate directions were given as to tapers and torches. Various officials of the kingdom such as the Chancellor, Treasurer, Master of the Rolls, Barons of the Exchequer and Justices of the Benches were

to receive fees if they attended the anniversary. So too the Mayor of London, the Recorder and Sheriffs, for whom the costs of their barges were to be defrayed. In default of attendance the fees were to go to the prisoners in the King's Bench or "mareschalsy." A weekly distribution of alms was provided for and an almshouse for thirteen poor men founded. Some nineteen other monastic or collegiate foundations were to receive fees from the Abbot of Westminster for the performance of services, as well as the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Masters, and scholars of both universities. It would be tedious to follow Islip's summary of the duties in any more elaborate detail and it must suffice to add that specific forfeitures of money were prescribed for the neglect of any article contained therein.

To meet all these expenses the King's endowment was generous. The Deanery of St. Martin-le-Grand, the Priory of Luffield, various manors and advowsons formed substantial gifts, while a sum of more than five thousand pounds in money was made over for the purchase of other estates. In the Orde MS. there is the entry of a payment of thirty thousand pounds for the purchase of lands for the King's new chapel, but it is not possible to verify the accuracy of what is only a transcript from the privy purse expenses of the King. The same manuscript records in seventeen different

items the payment of £9,844 18s. 3d. to the Abbot of Westminster for the carrying on of the building between October 1st, 1502, and May 20th, 1505. A number of entries in the King's Books of Payments (Treasury of Receipts) beginning in January, 1506, amount to more than £11,188, and so the total expenditure on the new building was certainly more than twenty-one thousand pounds. The last entry occurs on April 15th, 1509, about a week before the King died. It would appear to be a final payment for it refers to the *accomplishment and performing* of the chapel, while no entries of payments occur in the succeeding book. It is unfortunate that it is not at present possible to do much more than note the cost of the chapel and the years occupied in the building, for the "reckonings" which were presented by Islip from time to time for the royal approval do not appear, though all probable sources have been searched.

Islip would seem to have been the general supervisor of the works and responsible for the disbursement of the money, but the building itself was carried on under the direction of the royal workmen. One problem of the greatest interest remains unsolved, and that is the identity of the master-mason or architect who made the original design and plan of the chapel. Among the names suggested have been John Alcock, Bishop of Ely from 1486 to 1501; Sir Reginald Bray; Richard

Fox, Bishop of Winchester from 1501 to 1528, and even the King himself. Mr. Lethaby* assumes that there can be no doubt that Robert Vertue, the senior royal mason, was the architect, but in the absence of evidence the matter must remain unsolved. It is to be noted that the only person mentioned in the directions as to the chapel given in the will of Henry VII. is the Prior of St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield, who is described there as the master of the works of the said chapel. The reference is of course to Bolton who was Prior from 1505 to 1532 and whose work in his own church may still be seen. Stow refers to him as a great builder and in any discussion as to the identity of the architect his name must not be forgotten.

Mention has been already made† of the "brassen" chapel or chapel within the grille surrounding the tomb of Henry VII. One reference to this occurs in the Exchequer Accounts of September, 1505, where a payment is recorded of twenty pounds to "Thomas Ducheman Smith" for copper-work for the "chapell of metal" at Westminster. This chapel is said to have been called St. Saviour's, while the high altar of the new building retained its dedication to the Blessed Virgin. The dedications of the chapels in the apse cannot be determined with certainty, but

* Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen, page 255.
† See page 11.

among them may well be St. Dionysius, St. Ursula and St. Giles, for chapels in honour of these find mention in the Sub-sacrist's roll for the year ending at Michaelmas, 1524. If the last-named chapel may be identified with "o^{r} ffather Abbottes Chappell w^{t} in the new chapell" for which the Sub-sacrist was wont to supply six candles a year, there would be some slight additional reason for supposing that Islip's family name was Giles.

The work of Torregiano in connection with the tomb of the royal founder is too well known to call for additional record.

The devotion of the Jesus mass, which began to be popular towards the close of the fifteenth century, was in vogue at Westminster some years before the actual erection of the Jesus Chapel. For instance, in an indenture made between the Countess of Richmond and the Abbot and Convent in the year 1506 it was agreed that when her chapel was ready an altar should be erected there in honour of the Holy Name and the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, and that among the masses said there should be a Jesus mass every Friday.

It does not appear when the Jesus Chapel, now commonly known as the Islip chantry, was built. Its accounts, if they survive, are so inextricably mixed up with those of building in other parts of the church that it is impossible to separate them. We have, however, hints here and there which

suggest that it followed closely upon the completion of the chapel of Henry VII. It is certain that the Jesus Chapel was in use before it was actually finished, for the Sub-sacrist notes the provision of pound tapers to be burnt there at Christmas, 1523, while two years later there is a record in the *Novum Opus* roll of a payment for carving in the chapel. The final decoration was not completed until 1530, when Master Humfrey received the last instalment of the money owing to him for "payntyng uppon the wall in Ihs Chappell" and for some further work in connection with the Five Wounds which John Ellys had made for the stairs. The Islip roll gives some faint indication of the painted Crucifixion on the eastern walls above the altars and shews also the medallion of the head of our Lord on the outer side of the western parapet. There is record that weekly masses were said for Islip after his death and these would naturally be performed in the chapel where he lay buried, so that Islip's chantry is a fitting description of it; but it is to be regretted that its earlier name and dedication should be relatively forgotten.

The completion of the nave and the building of this chapel do not form the whole tale of work for which Islip was directly responsible. The same document which records the payment for painting of the Jesus Chapel refers to *my lordes chapell at Chenygates*. On the northern side of the courtyard

over part of the substructure of Abbot Litlyngton he built a set of rooms of two storeys and continued the building round the side of the south-west tower, making a window into the nave of the church. The whole of course forms a private part of the present Deanery, but the panelled chamber called Jericho Parlour which looks on to the courtyard is well enough known. The chapel at Cheynygates has been identified with a chamber on the upper floor built in between the tower and the first buttress of the nave.

In addition to the work in connection with the Abbey church and his own house Islip was called upon in 1518 to undertake the rebuilding of the chancel of St. Margaret's Church, of which the Convent took the rectorial tithes. The rebuilding of that church had already occupied some years of the previous century but had been carried on with a view to the least possible disturbance of parochial worship. The nave was completed before Islip was required to rebuild the chancel. It was work which he could not neglect, for the King had made a special grant of land to facilitate the extension of the church. In justice to him it must be mentioned that there is no evidence to shew that he desired to escape his responsibilities. When in 1905 the chancel was still further extended the demolition of the east wall revealed two stones bearing Islip's *rebus* with which in some of its

varying forms the visitor to the Abbey church is familiar. These stones may still be seen incorporated into the east wall of the chancel of St. Margaret's and in fact their pattern has been multiplied in the frieze of the wooden panelling.

No narrative of Islip's work as a builder would be complete without some attempt, however slight, to indicate the debt which the world owes to the activity which he and his immediate predecessors displayed. This can only be estimated by a consideration of the Abbey church as it is with some thought as to what it might have been. The conservatism with which the later builders of the nave adhered to the original pattern has given to the church "a unity and a harmony which largely contribute to its special beauty." So far as the interior of the church is concerned nothing could destroy this, for Islip lived to complete it. How much that unity has been destroyed externally by the addition of Hawkesmoor's western towers is sufficiently obvious, and we are left to conjecture the possible fate of the interior also had its completion been left for a later age. If Islip had not died when he did it is probable that the march of events would not have allowed him to finish the western front as he must have desired to do. That he lived to do so much must be a matter of thankfulness to the many who love the place with understanding.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST DAYS OF THE CONVENT.

"The knell that tolled at Islip's death was really a knell for the Convent itself." The appointment of his successor was long delayed and it is probable that intrigue was rife in the matter. John Fulwell, then Monk-Bailiff, was evidently strong enough to assume considerable authority in the monastery and it may well be that he looked to be appointed himself. On October 16th, 1532, he wrote to Cromwell reporting that "all things in the sanctuary as well within the monastery as without are in due order, according to the advertisement you gave me when I was last with you in London. At your return I trust you shall not hear but that we shall deserve the King's most gracious favour in our suit." Whatever may have been Fulwell's hopes they were destined to be disappointed as was an effort made three years later by his friends to bribe Cromwell into giving him the Priorship of Worcester.

The year drew to a close without any appointment to the vacancy, and not until May in the following year is there any certain news of its being filled. On the twelfth of that month William Boston, a monk of Peterborough, took the oath in the Chancery Court to observe the conditions of the foundation of Henry VII. For three hundred years some son of the house had been chosen to rule over it. Boston was a stranger and it is doubtful if he obtained his office in a manner honourable to himself or to those who procured it for him. Three of the abbatial manors were mortgaged by him until he should have paid five hundred pounds to Cromwell and Sir William Paulet who was Controller of the royal household. It is perhaps unfair to blame him for the exchanges of land with the King by which the Abbey lost the manors of Hyde, Neyt and Eye, together with Covent Garden, but it is the fact which is most remembered against him.

It was in his time and in his own Chapter House that the famous thrill of horror ran through the assembled Commons at the reading of the *Comperta* or findings of the Commissioners employed to make a case against the monastic houses of England. How much credit may be given to the findings of men who were themselves of a not too high standard of morality and honesty we shall not attempt to determine. It must be sufficient to say that no

breath of scandal touched Westminster. It was a city set upon an hill which could not be hid, and its fall came for none of those grosser sins alleged against some other houses.

The story of Abbot Boston's rule cannot be told in any detail owing to the lack of material. A kind of paralysis seems to have fallen on the monastery with his election. Account rolls if written at all were left untotalled, unbalanced and unaudited. He gathered into his own hands the more important offices as they fell vacant, holding ultimately those of the Sacrist, Cellarer, Warden of the New Work, Warden of the Lady Chapel, and Domestic Treasurer. It would almost seem as if Boston had been brought in to undo all that Islip had wrought and deliberately to provide an excuse for a dissolution which in Islip's day would have been hard to find.

Under Cromwell's influence and in obedience to his orders as Vicar-General Boston allowed his monks to be absent from the monastery on any plea of mental or bodily recreation. It was a subtle move thus to recreate a desire for the world that had once been renounced. This and the absence of any responsibility of office within the monastery were swift to sever the bonds of what in Islip's day had been a family with but little dissension, and the path to the final dissolution was an easy one.

On January 16th, 1540, the deed of surrender was signed by Boston and twenty-six of the brethren. The Abbot became Dean of the new collegiate foundation and many of the house remained therein as prebendaries or minor canons. Among these was Thomas Elfrede, who was installed as ninth prebendary. To him the change cannot have brought much comfort. Forty-two years previously he had taken part in Fascet's election as Abbot, and he had been one of those who voted in 1500 for Islip. It would be small wonder if his heart yearned for the older days and misliked the new. There is a note of pathos in the request which the old man recorded in his Will that he should be buried by the south door of the church in what was *sometyme the procession waye*, desiring to be carried in death along the path he had trodden so many times in the more peaceful days of his profession.

THE END.

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Mortuary Roll of John Islip.

Infirmarer's Rolls, 1480-84.

Muns. 9462, 12790, 6631 *dors.*

VOW ON PROFESSION.

"Ego, frater N., promitto stabilitatem meam et conversionem morum meorum et obedientiam secundum regulam Sancti Benedicti, coram Deo et Sanctis omnibus Ejus, in hoc

monasterio quod est constructum in honore Beati Petri, Apostolorum principis, in presentia domini N. abbatis."

COATS OF ARMS.

ISLIP Ermine, a fesse engrailed between three weasels, ensigned of a jewelled mitre.

GILES Ermine, a fesse engrailed between three crosses formy fitchy, three martlets on the fesse.

[Hope: *Vetusta Monumenta.*]

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